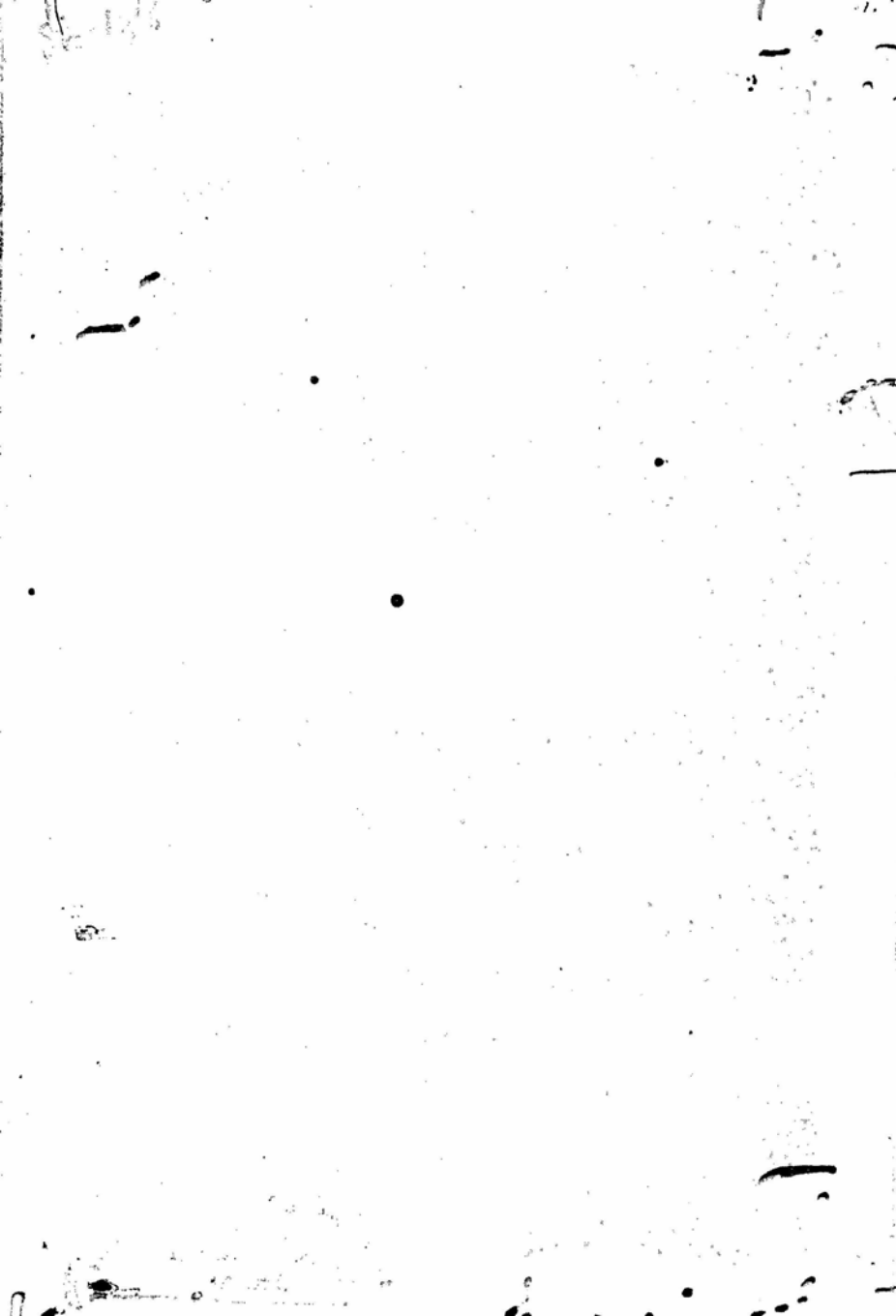


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CHAPTER ONE

Ancient China

PEOPLE OFTEN SPEAK of the four thousand years of Chinese history in a way which suggests that the story of China is a very old one. This is not really true, because the four thousand years consist of the last two thousand, up to our own times, as well as two thousand years before the birth of Christ. Yet ancient Egypt and ancient Mesopotamia are much earlier than this, for they go back at least to four thousand years before the Christian Era.

The remarkable thing about China is not that the beginnings were so very early, but that recognizably the same civilization has continued from that distant age down to modern times. Before history there is what is called prehistory, an uncertain period in which archæology, the study of the material remains of man's activities, can tell us something of the life of a distant age, but cannot give us precise dates or a connected story of what happened. The prehistory of China goes back, if you take the extreme limit, to more than one hundred thousand years B.C. when the cave man now called "Peking Man" lived in the

caves of Chou Kou Tien, overlooking what was then a sea shore and is now the North China plain. Even Peking Man, the scientists can show, had some of the physical characteristics of the Chinese today, proving that the formation of the races of man is very much older and a much slower process than was formerly believed.

But when we speak of the prehistory of China we really mean a much later time than this, somewhere about 3000 B.C., the New Stone Age in China. There have recently been found several villages of this period, mostly in the north of China, and we know from these discoveries that the people of that time were in respect of their physical character very like, if not exactly the same as, the Chinese of today, for the Stone Age skeletons dug up in these excavations do not show any differences from those of modern men of the same region. The Stone Age Chinese made some very beautiful pottery, decorated with spiral designs in red and black, and they had a wide range of well-made stone tools. It



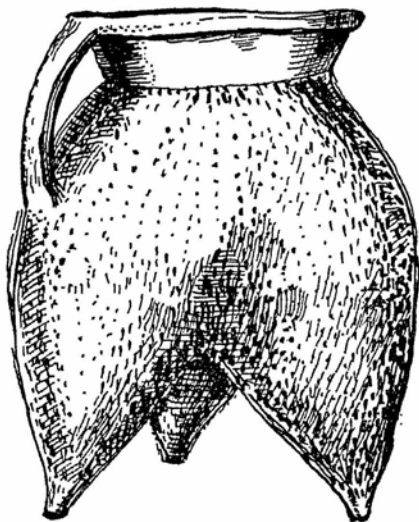
New Stone Age pottery

seems probable that they lived in huts half buried in the soil, but roofed with thatch; sometimes they lived in rooms hollowed out of the earth cliffs called *loess*, a peculiar kind of very hard and stable earth, originally made from wind-blown dust, which covers much of North China. Even today there are villages in North-West China where the people live in these hollowed-out chambers with a front wall of brick added on.

The Stone Age Chinese were farmers, planting millet as their main crop. They also kept a number of domestic animals, of which the pig was the most common. This would still be true of their descendants at the present day. One kind of pot made by the Stone Age people directly links them with the later Chinese civilization. They made a pot which was really three joined together so that they had a common mouth, and the three bodies of the pot made a kind of short tripod under which the cooking fire burned. In this way you could warm three different foods at the same time in the same pot. This tripod pot, called a *li* in Chinese, was made in the early centuries of Chinese civilization and has continued right down to modern times. No other people have ever made them, so the *li* is a definite proof of the connection between the New Stone Age culture in China and later civilization.

We do not know quite how long the New Stone Age culture lasted in China, nor do we know where and when the Chinese learned to work metal and invented their system of writing. There

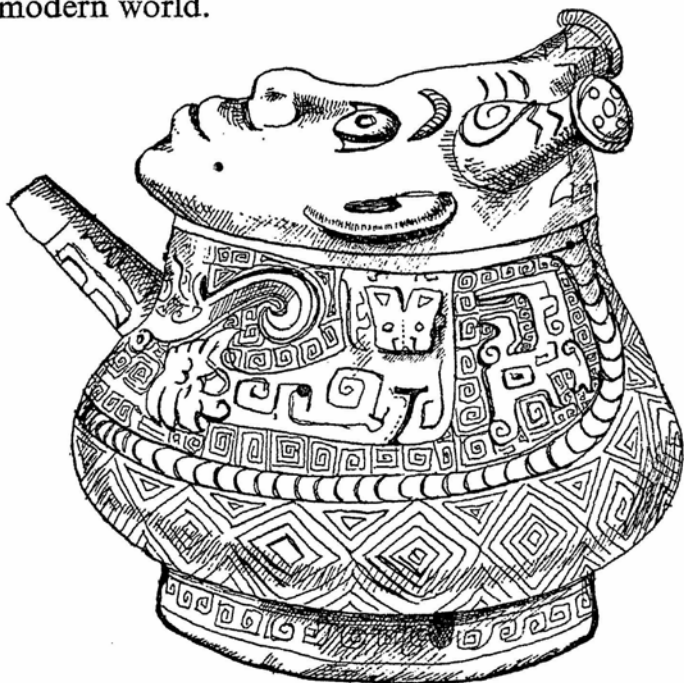
is a big gap in what archæology has so far discovered. Between the Stone Age villages and the cities at Chengchou and Anyang, the first sites



Tripod pot called *li*

of the true Chinese civilization, there may be more than a thousand years, and in that long time the Chinese learned to work tin and copper into bronze, and to do this supremely well. The bronze vessels of the Shang period, as the first historical Chinese dynasty or kingdom is called, are wonderful works of art, intricately and finely decorated, beautifully cast, and elegant in shape and design. These are not the crude beginnings of a metal-working people, but the refined and delicate work of experts who must have inherited a long tradition of skill. It has been said that if

you tried to find metal-workers who could cast a bronze vessel as finely decorated as a Shang bronze it would be very difficult to do so in the modern world.



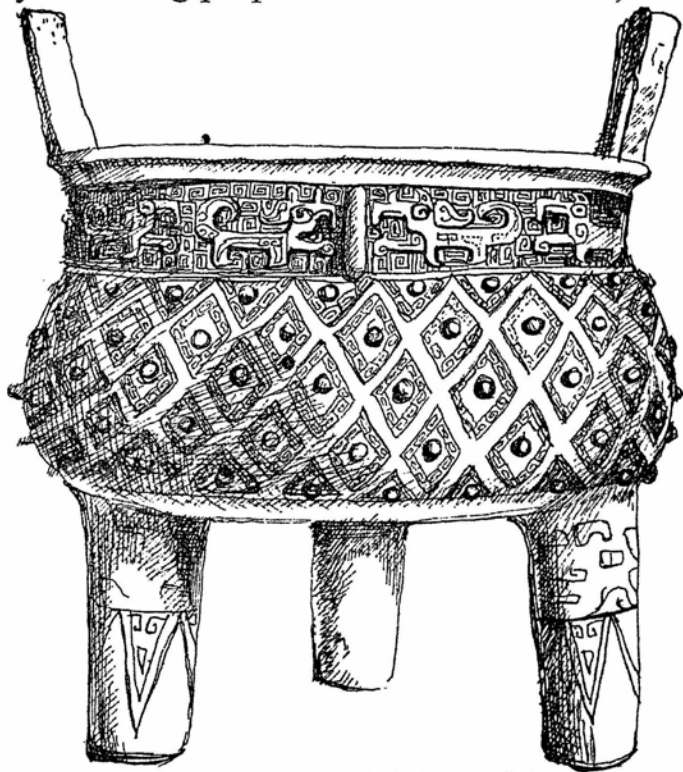
Bronze vessel of Shang period

Such bronzes come from the site of an ancient city, believed to be the second last capital of the Shang kingdom, called Anyang, in Honan province, about a hundred miles north of the present course of the Yellow River, but probably much closer to the course the river took in ancient times. Anyang was destroyed by a flood about 1100 B.C., so it belongs to the end of the

Shang kingdom, the beginning of which can be placed around 1700 B.C. Two or three years ago another Shang site was found, by chance, at Chengchou, a large city also in Honan province, a few miles south of the Yellow River. This site is certainly older than Anyang; the bronzes found in it are simpler, and though well made do not show the same elaborate decoration and technical skill as the Anyang pieces. Excavation at Chengchou is still going on, but up to the present there are no reports of finding any inscribed bones or other objects.

The beginnings of Chinese writing are still unknown. When it is first found, on the bone inscriptions at Anyang, it has already developed into a system quite close to the later Chinese script. Each separate character, or ideograph, represents one word, just as each figure in our system of arithmetic stands for a word as well as for an idea. "Five" is written 5, but we all know how to pronounce the sound without having to see it written as "five". In Chinese all words are written in this way, by a sign, which gives the meaning but does not in itself give the sound. In the early writing there were fewer signs, or characters, and their origin as pictures was easier to see, but already they were not simply pictures, but signs having a wider meaning. As far as we can tell, there is no reason to think that the Chinese system of writing came from any other country, and some strong reasons for thinking that it was developed in China itself.

The first early writings were always written, or scratched, on a shin-bone of an ox or the shell of a tortoise. The shells and bones were used by the Shang people to consult the oracles, and



Another bronze vessel of Shang period

the oracles they consulted were the king's ancestors. The method was to touch the bone or shell with a hot rod of bronze so that the heat cracked the surface of the shell or bone. The priest then "read" the cracks; that is to say, he

interpreted the way the cracks ran to mean such and such an answer from the oracle. It is thought that the forms of the first characters may have been suggested by the shapes of such cracks, and the first characters invented as a help for the learner priests to remember how to interpret the oracles.



Oracle bone inscribed with archaic Chinese characters

The questions asked from the oracle were written on the bone before the heat was applied, and then the answer, as read by the priest, was written down beside the question. In this way, from the large number of such bones and tortoise-shells found at Anyang, it is possible to know something of the Shang people, or at least of the life of the king and his court. Sometimes the question will be, "If the king goes hunting at (some place), will he have success?" And the answer, "He will kill twenty deer, twelve boar, etc., etc." Possibly after getting this answer it would have been considered unlucky and wicked to kill more than twenty deer and twelve boar, and in this way the oracle was always right. There are also questions about whether it will be lucky to go to war with some enemy people, and sometimes the answer is against it. The oracles were also asked about the crops for the coming season and whether there would be droughts or floods.

The royal ancestors were the spirits who were consulted in this way, and from this fact a very useful and valuable piece of history is confirmed. In the oldest Chinese traditional history, most of which is clearly pure legend, there is also a list of the kings of the Shang dynasty. There was nothing to show that this list was not an invention until the oracle bones at Anyang were discovered, and it was found that on them the names of the king's ancestors, the former kings, were all listed as the spirits who were being

consulted. The list of kings recovered from the bone inscriptions is the same list as the traditional history gives, with one or two names wrongly written in the history, probably from a mistake made centuries ago.

Although they were very expert metal-workers and had invented and developed a system of writing, the Shang people were in some ways still barbarous. The tombs of the kings excavated at Anyang show that many scores of attendants were sacrificed at the burial of the king, being decapitated in trenches dug round the tomb. Horses and chariots were also driven into deep pits, the horses slain, and the whole covered in with earth. We know from later Chinese literature that this custom of human sacrifice at the burial of kings, and perhaps also of other great men, continued for several centuries, until gradually it was changed to the custom of burying wooden images of men, horses and other things which the spirit of the dead person would need in the next world. Later still, these tomb images were made of baked clay and painted; and in modern times the images are made of paper and burnt at the funeral by the grave. It is often the case that some Chinese custom still in use can in this way be traced back for thousands of years to an ancient origin.

The Shang people kept many slaves who were captives made in war with the neighbouring peoples. It is not possible to know whether these slaves were used only as domestic servants or

also worked on the land, nor do we really know how extensive the Shang kingdom was. It seems that it covered most of the lower part of the Yellow River valley, and some sites with Shang-type objects have been found farther up the river in Shensi province. It is also probable that there were many areas inside the kingdom inhabited by barbarous peoples who lived in the great marshes which the Yellow River and its many branches made in eastern China. The work of dyking-in these rivers and draining the land for agriculture needed large numbers of men and a ruler who governed a wide extent of country. It is believed that this need was one of the reasons why the early Chinese kingdoms were from the first quite large, often as large as a modern European country. It is also possible that the slaves taken in war were employed on these works.

Apart from what can be found out from archæology and excavations, we also know something about the Shang kingdom from early literature. It is not nowadays thought by scholars that any of these early books were really written in the Shang period itself—as used to be believed—but some parts of them do appear to relate stories which are more or less genuine traditions of the end of the Shang kingdom. In the west part of the kingdom, in the province of Shensi, there were a people called Chou. It seems that they were not so advanced as the Shang of the eastern plains, but their ruler was a kind of

feudal lord under the King of Shang. It used to be thought that the Chou were a different people, perhaps invaders from the west of Asia, but this idea is not now accepted. The last King of Shang, Chou Hsin, is described in the ancient texts as a ferocious tyrant who oppressed his people, slew the nobles, and indulged in all manner of barbarous and cruel amusements. Finally the chief of the Chou, called Wu, rebelled, marched eastwards, was joined by many discontented people and other tribes, met the King of Shang, defeated him in battle, captured his capital and slew him. After that Wu was proclaimed king, and founded a new dynasty called Chou after his ancestral territory. The traditional date of the fall of Shang is 1122 B.C., but no dates as early as this can be regarded as precisely correct.

In the old Chinese histories, the first of which was written many centuries after these events, the kings of Shang and Chou are usually treated as if they were real emperors of all China, but this is quite a false picture of the country at that time. Shang was a large kingdom, covering perhaps somewhat less than a fifth part of modern China: but it certainly did not extend to the Yangtze valley, possibly not as far as the north-east coast and the Shantung peninsula. In those huge regions lived people who were probably not very different from the Shang, but about whom we know as yet very little. Nor is it correct to speak of these early rulers as "emperors".

This title, or rather the Chinese word which we translate as "emperor", was not used until very much later. The early rulers used the title of. "wang", which we translate as king, but which in modern times came to mean merely "prince".

The first kings of the new house of Chou set up their capital in the west, in their old fief, at a place close to the later city of Sian. They parcelled out the kingdom among the king's sons and brothers, each of whom received a large fief, and they assumed titles which are equivalent to duke, marquis and count. In fact the Chou system was a feudal system with many customs and institutions similar to the European feudal system which arose nearly two thousand years later. In the traditional history all these great nobles are made out to be relatives of the king, but it has been shown that several of them were really the chiefs of allied tribes who joined the war against the Shang, and were independent rulers who might have found it wise and convenient to acknowledge the warlike King Wu for a time as their overlord. This allegiance did not last long. Recent archæological discoveries have even proved that the Shang power itself was not wholly overthrown by King Wu; his son and successor was still warring with Shang supporters in eastern China many years later. It was known from the traditional histories that the small state of Sung was ruled by a descendant of the kings of Shang in Chou times; but it was described as a territory left to this family so that

they should not be wholly without land. In Chou times it was believed that a ruling family could not carry out the appropriate sacrifices to the ancestors unless it was actually in possession of some territory, however small; so, in order to preserve the future life of the ancestral spirits it was necessary to leave their descendants in power over some small fief. It seems that the Shang retained their territory of Sung, not only through the grace of the conquerors but by force of arms.

We do not know very much in detail of the early Chou period. The custom of taking oracles by tortoise-shell and bone seems to have declined; at least no large stores of such oracle bones have been found. On the other hand, the Chou people began to inscribe their bronze vessels which were used in the sacrifices to ancestors. Some of these inscriptions are quite long, and record that the maker of the bronze had been invested with a fief, or given some other reward by the king, and that he made this precious bronze to be used in his ancestral worship. It is uncertain whether the use of bronzes in the ancestral sacrifices was itself an honour which only the king could bestow on noblemen, but it is clear that very many of the bronzes were made to record awards of fiefs and other honours. From these records it can be seen that the early Chou government was a feudal monarchy in which the king still had great power, and was able to allot large territories con-

quered from barbarians to his faithful followers.

The written histories of this period all come from much later, and their dating is vague and uncertain. They give an outline of the early Chou period, for something over three hundred years, until 841 B.C. when the first authentic and dated chronicle begins. The kings named in this history are also known from bronze inscriptions which were made in their lifetime, so there is no doubt that they really lived, but very little of what is told of them can be confirmed from the bronze inscriptions. In 770 B.C. the Chou capital in western China, near Sian, was taken by an invasion of northern barbarians, probably nomadic people from Mongolia. The Chou fled to the east and set up their government at Loyang in Honan province near the Yellow River. The site of this city has been found and is now preserved, a mile or two outside the walls of modern Loyang. The fall of the old capital and its destruction by the barbarians is probably one reason why the records of the early Chou period are so scanty and vague.

After the fall of the old capital and flight to the east, the kings of Chou never recovered the same power as their forbears; the great nobles became more and more powerful and independent until some of them were far stronger than the king himself. These great fiefs then began to annex the smaller ones and to war among themselves. The king could no longer control them, but he still had a great prestige; only he could make a

new state or fief, and without his permission no new title could be legally taken. The great feudal lords still made ceremonial visits to the royal capital and had an audience with the king, paid tribute, usually in the form of precious gifts rather than money, and were invested by the king with titles and honours. This was certainly the way the inner feudal lords still behaved towards the king in the eighth, seventh and sixth centuries B.C.; but beyond them, to the south and the west, were new states which had really never been part of the Chou kingdom at all and did not acknowledge the King of Chou as their overlord.

To the south, in the middle Yangtze valley, the provinces now called Hupeh and Hunan, was the country of Ch'u. The northern Chinese liked to speak of Ch'u as if it were a barbarous state, but archæology has shown that this is quite wrong. At Ch'angsha, the capital of Hunan province, a very ancient city, once also the capital of Ch'u, Ch'u period tombs have been found which contain works of art, lacquer ware (the earliest found in China), remains of fine textiles, wood carvings and bronzes. It is evident that Ch'u civilization was not inferior to that of the north, although we know very little of its origin or early development. The Ch'u people spoke a different dialect, which northern Chinese did not understand, and this was also the case in two other southern kingdoms along the south-east coast, which at this time first begin to be

mentioned. The kingdom of Wu was situated on the lower Yangtze; its rival and chief enemy, the kingdom of Yueh, farther down the coast in the modern province of Chekiang. These provinces later became perhaps the most civilized and refined area in China, but in this ancient period the two kingdoms—which did not really accept the Chou overlordship—were thought of as barbarous by the northern Chinese.

Away to the west, after the Chou kings had moved to Loyang in the east, a new state arose called Ch'in, which gradually became very powerful by conquering the far western territories which had never been part of the Chou kingdom. So at the beginning of the age when Chinese history begins to be well recorded and detailed the country was divided into an inner group of states nominally subject to the King of Chou, but actually more powerful than he, and an outer ring of still larger states which barely acknowledged the Chou at all, or claimed to be entirely independent (as did Ch'u). The wars and contests of these states, which went on continuously for several centuries, are the main subject of the early histories.

This most ancient period of Chinese history, ending in the middle of the eighth century B.C. (770 B.C.), is mainly known to us by archæological discoveries. The excavations at Anyang are the most extensive and thorough work in this field which has yet been made, and when the same exploration of other known sites is carried out it

will certainly clear up a great many doubtful points and prove, or disprove, a great part of the written history of this age, all of which dates from much later and cannot yet be confirmed. Already it is known that the rather superior attitude to the southern kingdoms which the writers of the northern histories took up is hardly justified by what has been found in these countries, which seem to have had their own independent civilization, only partly influenced by that of northern China. The ancient writers also all believed that in former times, legendary times, and in the early days of the Shang dynasty, all China had been under the rule of one king, who had full authority in every part of a huge empire. This idea, which these writers took from the situation in their own time, has no foundation in fact. It is quite certain that the early Shang and Chou kings only ruled a part of North China, mainly in the Yellow River valley, and had no power over the south, the Yangtze valley, or even the east coast.

On the other hand, it is more probable that the southern people, whom the northern Chinese spoke of as barbarous and alien, were not really very different from the northerners themselves, even though they spoke different dialects (as many of them still do). These southern kingdoms conquered barbarous peoples to the south and west of them, and in this way grew larger and more powerful than the states in the old Chou kingdom itself.

CHAPTER TWO

Feudal China

THE LATTER PART of the Chou period is much better known than the early centuries of that kingdom. The Chou dynasty lasted from about 1122 B.C. until 221 B.C., nine hundred years, but in the later part the rule of the King of Chou was only nominal; all power had passed to the great nobles, who later on actually took the title of king themselves. This second part of the Chou dynasty is divided into two periods, both about two hundred and fifty years long. The first is called by Chinese historians the Spring and Autumn period, after a chronicle called by that name. The Spring and Autumn Chronicle covers the years from 722-481 B.C.; it used to be thought that it was written by Confucius himself, who lived from 551 to 479 B.C. Later scholars have shown that this book was not really the work of Confucius, but as his disciples were very anxious to preserve all the old books, and Confucius himself also revered them, such books were treasured by the Confucians and came in time to be attributed to the Master. The Spring and Autumn period is

also known by other contemporary works, and from these sources, as well as the discoveries of archæology, it is possible to get a clear picture of that age and the ideas which men held at the time.

This was the age when the Chou feudal system was beginning to break down. The power of the King of Chou had declined, and the leadership of the inner ring of great fiefs was disputed among the most powerful nobles, one of whom was given a kind of unofficial title—Pa—which means “Overlord” and has sometimes been translated by the Greek word “Hegemon”. The Overlord was recognized only by his military power. If some other great noble became more powerful, or defeated the Overlord in battle, he was in turn recognized as Overlord. Confucius and the conservative scholars who followed him considered that this system was wrong and impious. The King of Chou should be the only Overlord, and the great nobles had no right to usurp his authority. So the Confucians in their writings tried to emphasize the legal rights of the king and ignore the actual power of the great nobles. There were altogether five of these Overlords, and their authority lasted for about ninety years, from 685–591 B.C. It is a clear proof of the growing power of the outer states, those who were not really a part of the old Chou kingdom, that while the first three of the Overlords were rulers of states forming part of that kingdom, the last two were the rulers of the states of

Ch'in and Ch'u; Ch'in being the new power rising in the north-west, and Ch'u the great southern kingdom which centred on the Yangtze valley. The later history of China in the Chou dynasty is centred round the rivalry of these two powers, and the struggle between them finally ended in the conquest of all China by the victor, the end of the Chou dynasty, and the founding of a centralized unified empire.

That was, however, far in the future, in the lifetime of Confucius. In his time the feudal system still stood, and the relations between rival nobles were carried on in a ceremonious and moderate way, even if the quarrel ended in a war. The noblemen always fought in war chariots manned by two retainers, the driver and the "right-hand man" who shielded his lord on that side while the lord was shooting his arrows. Around the chariots of the nobles the common soldiers fought on foot, but it seems that, at least in the earlier time, they did not play a very important part in the battle, which was decided by the contest of the chariots. In those days there were rules of chivalry, just as the European feudal nobles observed similar rules. It was considered "unsporting" to kill a noble who had been thrown from his chariot. He should be given the chance to get up and mount again, and there is a sculpture from an ancient tomb showing a case where the fallen noble is being shielded by his "right-hand man", who has wrenched off the canopy of the broken chariot to keep the arrows

off his lord, while the enemy noble approaches, bowing courteously, and inviting the fallen man to mount again.

There were other rules, which some of the great lords observed and others did not. It was



A fallen Chou nobleman shielded by his follower in battle

wrong to attack the enemy until they had formed their battle line; no unfair advantage should be taken; and it was also wrong to surround the beaten foe so completely that he had no way of escape. All extremes were considered base, and unfitting for a noble to employ. Some of the great nobles were very scrupulous in observing such rules. Once the Duke of Ch'i, then a very powerful state, who had been travelling in another fief, was accompanied by his host, the Duke of Yen. The Duke of Yen, in order to honour his powerful guest and ally, crossed his own frontier and followed the Duke of Ch'i for another day's journey. But the Duke of Ch'i said, "Only the King is allowed to accompany

nobles beyond his own territory". So he marked off the area which the Duke of Yen had crossed, and made a present of it to the Duke of Yen.

Unlike the European feudal nobles, the ancient Chinese feudal lords were not only the rulers and aristocracy of the country but also the scholars, and, indeed, the only class that received any education. The religion of this period was still the ancestor worship which the Shang had practised; it had a very elaborate ritual, about which not very much detail is known, but it is known that members of the noble families acted as priests in their own ancestral temples. For this reason no separate class of priests arose in China, and there was never the division between lay and cleric which was so important in European feudalism.

One of the rituals required a boy, or youth, to impersonate the dead ancestor in the ceremony. The purpose of this may have been to educate the younger members of the family in the traditions and records of past generations. It is also known that among the common people there was a rather different religion, probably also very ancient. This cult had a priesthood, called "Wu", who seem to have performed rites rather like those practised today by the shamans of the northern Siberian tribes, and the Red Indians. These Wu were believed to become possessed by spirits, fell into a trance, or danced, and were thought to have the gift of prophecy. The Wu priests did not come from the noble families,

and consequently they did not obtain power and influence in society.

Although so much later than Anyang, the Chinese feudal period is not so well known from archaeological finds. Up to the present time no Chou city has been so thoroughly excavated as Anyang; most of the finds from this period come from tombs, and in many cases the tombs have not been scientifically excavated, but robbed by treasure-seekers. The greatest parts of the finds are therefore bronze vessels, which had a great value on the curio market. Many of these are inscribed, and such inscriptions give very valuable information about the feudal system and the way in which nobles were invested with fiefs, but very few add to our knowledge of the course of events at the time. Some tombs found recently, and properly preserved, contain wooden or clay figures, furniture, pottery and lacquer ware, but no sculpture. On the other hand, in the succeeding period, called the Han dynasty, it was common to show scenes from past history in sculpture (bas-reliefs) in tombs, and from these we have many examples showing famous episodes in the Spring and Autumn period, already known from literature.

Towards the end of the period covered by the Spring and Autumn Chronicle the old feudal moderation began to fail, and the wars between the different states grew fiercer and more frequent. The next age, the last period of the Chou dynasty, is called by Chinese historians the Age

of the Warring States, which lasted from 481–221 B.C. This period of a little over two and a half centuries was filled with constant wars, which were no longer fought in the old limited ceremonious way, but steadily grew into a desperate struggle, the aim of which was not any local victory but the conquest of the whole Chinese world. The history of the time is filled with alliances, treasons, stratagems and sudden changes of fortune, as first one, then another state gained a temporary advantage, only to find the others combine against it. One by one the smaller states were swallowed up by powerful neighbours, and soon even famous and ancient states were conquered and enslaved. The battles of this period were now on a very large scale and, if we are to believe the chronicles of the time, thousands and tens of thousands of men were engaged, with very heavy losses to the defeated side. The King of Chou, now a powerless antique figure ruling over a diminished territory, had no influence at all upon his former subjects. In 325 B.C. the remaining powerful rulers showed their contempt for the old system by all taking the title of king. In reality the Chou dynasty did not exist after this date, but as no other power gained complete mastery for another century the convention of still calling the period “the Chou dynasty” has remained.

The Age of the Warring States was also the age of the philosophers and thinkers who have influenced all later Chinese civilization. While

the kings and rulers schemed and planned their surprise campaigns, these scholars gathered a few disciples and wandered from Court to Court in search of a wise king who would put their theories into practice. Confucius himself was the first, and the most famous, of these wandering scholars. He was a gentleman of the small state of Lu, descended from an ancient and aristocratic family, but in his lifetime Lu no longer counted as an important state, and its ruler, a man of frivolous character, was certainly not the philosopher king whom Confucius sought. So after a short service at Court he retired in disgust and spent the rest of his life teaching and seeking for a new patron. In this he was not successful; the future fame of his doctrines was not known to his own time, and depended on the fact that he had inspired a school of devoted followers who carried on his work and preserved his teaching.

But Confucius was by no means the only philosopher of this age, in which the Chinese, like the Greeks of almost the same centuries, began to question all the old ideas and accepted beliefs of their forefathers. Another school of philosophy was supposed to have been founded by a teacher called Lao Tzu, but modern research has shown that it is unlikely that any such person ever existed, and the famous book, the *Way and Its Power*,* which is attributed to him was the work of some unknown writer using a pen-name. The followers of the Way are called

* Title as translated by A. Waley.

Taoists (for "Tao" is the Chinese word for "Way") and their teaching was the exact opposite of that of Confucius. Confucius believed that men should play an active part in society, doing their best to improve manners and morals, keeping to the ancient traditions of chivalry and honour (which were very much neglected in Confucius' own time) and trying to revive the golden age of the sage emperors of mythical times, which, it seems, Confucius believed to be true history. His Aristocratic Man was to be a pattern of these virtues and a model which the Small Man, not only the social but also the moral inferior, would then endeavour to copy. This is the theory of government by Moral Force which in later times the Chinese Empire tried to follow, and on rather rare occasions succeeded in imitating.

The Taoists, on the contrary, considered that all human society was hopelessly corrupt; the sage should withdraw from it, seeking in solitude to cultivate his own virtue and understanding of the mysterious forces of the universe. They did not believe in government, in ceremonies, rites or any other human institution. They also doubted the reality of the world as it appears to us. One of their most famous teachers, Chuang Tzu, has a story that once he was asleep and dreamed he was a butterfly, flitting from flower to flower, with no other thought than to gather the honey. Then he woke up; and did not know whether he was now a butterfly asleep dreaming

that he was a man, or had been a man asleep dreaming that he was a butterfly. In later centuries, although the Confucian school prevailed and became the official philosophy of the Chinese Empire, the Taoists never died out, and there were always men, tired of office and its troubles, who retired to the mountains to cultivate Taoist perfection.

Another school, famous and flourishing at this time, preached a kind of religion not unlike the Christian teaching on many points. They taught brotherly love, disbelieved in war, but organized themselves into a society which obeyed the teaching of a single leader. He was called Mo Tzu ("Tzu" in these names simply means "Master") and was much admired in his lifetime as an outstanding personality and saint. But his school did not endure. Either because love and pacificism were too far removed from the grim realities of that age of strife, or because his followers did not maintain his high standards, little remained of his teaching in later years except some fragments of his books.

There were, it is clear, many other schools, of which only the names, some fragment of their doctrine, or some reference to their views by rivals, remain today, and this is because the school which triumphed for a time made a point of suppressing all its rivals. The School of the Law, as this sect is called, were hard-headed realists, or so they believed. The only things that mattered were how to make a state strong for

war. No arts, no literature, no teaching that did not help to build up military power had any value in their eyes. Laws must be strict and severe; no one, however, exalted in rank, could escape their power. In this way, even if the king were a weakling, they believed the kingdom would still be strong. The only occupation, other than soldiering, which they admitted to be useful was agriculture. Farmers to supply the food, soldiers to win the wars, the kingdom needed no others. Perhaps they made an exception for themselves, the counsellors who proclaimed these laws,* for none of them were either soldiers or farmers.

These drastic calculating men came into power in the state of Ch'in, the western state on the border of ancient China, and when Ch'in proved the strongest and gradually overcame all its rivals they claimed this success as proof that their teachings were sound and true. Once Ch'in had conquered the whole of China, and founded the centralized Chinese Empire, the School of the Law, now triumphant, suppressed the rival teachings, and in order to make this act final all works written by the other schools were burned. This is the famous "Burning of the Books" which destroyed a great part of the Chinese literature and is a main cause of the fact that knowledge of the ancient Chinese world is so sketchy by comparison with the later period.

Not all the wandering scholars were teachers of philosophy. In all probability very few of them

were men of this character; most were adventurers seeking a career. When the great states began, in the age of Confucius, to annex the small ones, hundreds of the old courtiers and nobles of the annexed states were left without a career or any hope of employment. They had been brought up in loyalty to their own prince, the highest and prime virtue of the feudal noble of that time. So it went against their nature and training to become loyal to the prince who had dethroned their own lord. The conqueror in turn was suspicious of these new subjects who might betray him, and therefore gave them no posts. So the dispossessed nobles roamed about China, ready to sell their services to some foreign prince who might avenge their fallen state. If some rival paid better, they would betray their new master without hesitation, for they really owed him, an alien, no loyalty. On the other hand, the rival kings and princes of the warring states were glad enough to get able counsellors from any quarter, provided they could put up some scheme by which their new lord could get the better of his enemies. Almost all the famous statesmen of this time served princes who were not the rulers of their old home countries; many of them went from court to court, serving one prince for a few years, then flying suddenly to his enemy and gaining a new master by betraying the secrets of the last one. If successful, they became wealthy and famous; if they failed they suffered execution. In this way all the old loyalties

collapsed and the country was torn to pieces between rival scheming kings and their crafty, treacherous counsellors.

The Period of the Warring States is famous in Chinese literature as a romantic age of adventures and escapades, but in reality it must have been a nightmare world for high and low. The perils of high office were great, but so was the misery of the poor. The peasants were forced into the great armies which were ceaselessly at war; battles were most costly, and the defeated side were massacred by the victors. Even if the figures for those slain in some of these battles are cut in half, or divided by four, the numbers are still huge.

Gradually the rivals were reduced to a few great kingdoms, and of these, two, Ch'in in the west and Ch'u in the south were the most powerful. Soon the wars became a duel between them and their allies. Finally, conquering the remaining states one by one "as a silkworm eats a mulberry leaf", in the words of a great Chinese historian of the next century, Ch'in carried all before it, destroyed Ch'u, and survived as the sole master of the Chinese world (221 B.C.).

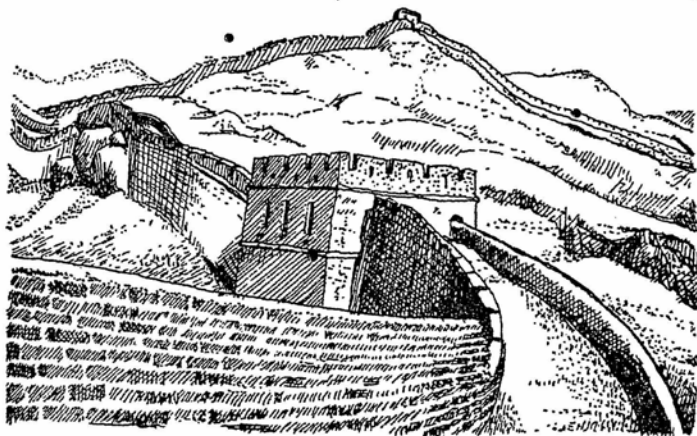
The King of Ch'in, who, aided by his counsellors of the School of the Law, thus triumphed over all his adversaries, decided to make China into a single unified state, and as he found the old title of "king" too slight for his new power and glory, he invented a new one, which we translate as "emperor". The Chinese

words which were used for this title had formerly been applied only to gods. The First Emperor (Shih Huang Ti), as he called himself, intended that all his successors of his own family should be numbered Second, Third, Fourth and so on, for "ten thousand generations". But in actual fact only one successor of this family reigned as Second Emperor.

For eleven years the First Emperor ruled supreme. He carried out great reforms, some of which were necessary and useful. He divided the country up into new, small provinces or "commanderies", as the term is translated. He abolished all the old feudal states and refused to make new ones for the benefit of his own family. He deported the old aristocracy, and so broke their local power and influence. He reformed the system of writing, standardizing the Chinese characters in a form which is practically the same as they have today. He made great roads throughout his empire, beat back the barbarians of the north, and conquered the far south, the Canton region, which had never yet been part of China.

He also did two things by which he is particularly remembered: he built the Great Wall as a defence against the northern barbarians, and he burnt the books. The Great Wall was not entirely his work; some sections of wall had been built by the kings of the states of the north, but the First Emperor joined all these together, built immense new stretches, and covered the whole frontier of China from the edge of the

Central Asian desert to the sea with a continuous wall, which still stands. It is said that millions of men were driven to work on this vast undertaking, and that hundreds of thousands perished from overwork and neglect in the



The Great Wall of China

northern wilderness. While the scholars still denounce him for burning the books, the people hold his memory in hatred for the building of the Wall.

The reason why he ordered the burning of the books has already been mentioned; it was to destroy the rival schools of thought who opposed the School of the Law, wished to restore the feudal system and disapproved of the new empire and its reforms. The School of the Law

did not believe in the value of histories and books of philosophy, poetry or other literature; consequently all these works were written by men who did not follow the teaching of the School of the Law and thus were looked upon as its enemies. Therefore the Emperor's advisers argued that as all books were the work of their opponents, the best way to crush the opposition was to destroy the books. It seems to be true that many of the men of letters did oppose the reforms of the First Emperor and in particular the abolition of all feudal states. They urged him to make new states and give them to his sons and brothers. But his chief minister, Li Ssu, argued that the division into feudal states was the first cause of the fall of the Chou dynasty and had led in time to the violence of the Warring States period. Now that the empire had at last been conquered and unified he thought it would be folly to divide it up again. The First Emperor agreed with Li Ssu.

Yet his rule was so harsh, the deportations and the forced labour so cruel, that when he died the new unified empire broke into universal revolt. The First Emperor was anxious for a long life, to enjoy his conquests. He hated the thought of old age and death. At this time there had arisen a sect of magicians who promised to obtain for him the Drug of Immortality, which, they said, was in the keeping of Immortals who lived on the fairy island of P'eng Hu in the Eastern Sea. This seems to be the first mention in history of the

"Elixir Vitæ" or Drug of Immortality, a belief which appears to have arisen in China in this period and spread to Europe one or two centuries later. The First Emperor was anxious to go to P'eng Hu to obtain the Drug, but the magicians were too clever to let him do that.

The ablest of them told the Emperor that only those who knew the secret arts could reach P'eng Hu and must bring with them a band of young boys and girls, for those would be pleasing to the Immortals. So he obtained from the Emperor a retinue of girls and boys, a great treasure, and set off in his ships for P'eng Hu. He never came back; and it has been supposed that he found one of the islands, perhaps southern Japan or Formosa, and settled there with his followers.

Still hoping to gain the Drug of Immortality, the First Emperor died in eastern China, far from his capital, which was in the modern province of Shensi—the ancient Ch'in state. The minister Li Ssu and the Court were much afraid that if the people knew that the Emperor was dead there would be a revolt. They also feared that their rivals at the capital would gain control of the weak and inept son who was now to be the Second Emperor. So they marched back in all haste and concealed the First Emperor's death. As it was summer and his body began to decay, they put a load of fish on a cart which followed behind the Emperor's closed carriage so that the soldiers should not guess that he was dead. It seems odd that they should not, equally, have

wondered why the all-powerful Emperor should tolerate a cartload of stinking fish travelling along with him.

The Second Emperor was proclaimed, but at once the whole empire burst into rebellion. The armies of Ch'in, which a few years before had conquered all China, were now defeated and dispersed. The Second Emperor was murdered, and his capital captured by the rebels. The Ch'in dynasty collapsed, but the rebels soon quarrelled among themselves. At first they tried to set up the old feudal system again, but the generals who led the revolt would not obey the descendants of the fallen kings of Ch'u or Ch'i; they demanded kingdoms for themselves, took them by force, and then fought each other for supremacy. After several years of anarchy and civil war one leader emerged supreme, a man of the people, Liu Pang, not a great general, but an able strategist and cunning politician, who won over his rivals' supporters and finally conquered all China, to found the Han dynasty and restore the central, unified empire. With that event a new age in Chinese history opened, a great creative period for art and literature, which has served as a model for the later imperial dynasties down to modern times.

CHAPTER THREE

Early Imperial China

THE EMPIRE OF the Han, which in all covered a period of four hundred and twenty-eight years (206 B.C. to A.D. 222), was the first long-enduring dynasty of the new unified China, and became the model which later dynastic founders sought to restore and to copy. In this way the great Han Empire plays for China a part rather like the Roman Empire in Europe. In both cases the rule of Rome and of Han gave peace and order to a huge area which had hitherto always been plagued by ceaseless wars: and in both cases men looked back, after their fall, to Rome and the Han dynasty, as the great ages of established and secure civilization. As it happens, this period of unity and power came to Europe and China at very much the same time, for Rome and the Han dynasty were contemporaries. This fact, and some resemblances in the way they both came to ruin, has led many historians to see a pattern in these events, and to find likenesses which really are not there.

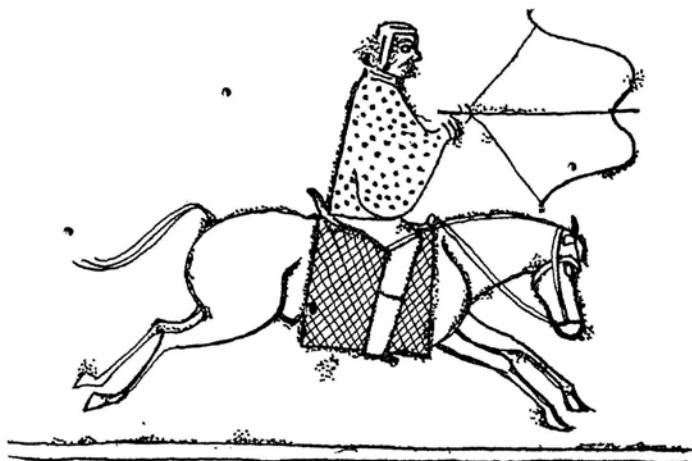
For there were many things in China under the Han dynasty which differed very much from

Roman Europe. It is now fairly certain that in Han China the language was the same in all parts of the country. It is probable that there were still dialects spoken in the outer provinces, but these were almost barbarous languages. Chinese itself seems to have been uniform, north and south. It was, of course, now written in one way, in one script, which could be read as easily in one region as in another. This is still the case, although in later centuries the speech of the southern provinces became strange to the northerners. Thus there was no division between two languages of culture, such as Latin and Greek; in China there was only Chinese, in which all literature and history, poetry and religion was recorded.

Another important difference between Rome and Han China is that the Chinese only had dangerous neighbours, the northern nomadic Tartar peoples, on one frontier. The northern border was a perilous place, which had to be defended by such works as the Great Wall manned by large forces. But on the west the Chinese were guarded by the great mountain zone of Tibet, inhabited then by harmless or weak savage tribes. To the south the Chinese advanced into what is now South China at the expense of other peoples, all small, all much weaker than the Chinese, but not very different in race or culture. It was therefore easy to absorb them and to bring them into the empire. The Eastern Sea, the Pacific Ocean as we call it, was

then almost untravelled. A few venturesome Chinese sailed across and found Japan, but no enemies then came from across the sea; on three sides the Han Empire was secure.

It was not very long after the foundation of the



Tartar horseman armed with bow

dynasty before the Han Emperors began to take advantage of this situation. They sought for allies in the far west who could get in behind their enemies, the people called Hsiung Nu, who lived in what is now Mongolia, beyond the Great Wall. The Hsiung Nu were a Tartar people, who have been thought to be perhaps the ancestors or kin of the Huns who invaded the Roman Empire about five hundred years after the foundation of the Han Empire. There were many wars between China and the Hsiung Nu,

who were always mounted men. To meet this sort of enemy the Chinese, who often fought on foot, had to learn cavalry tactics, and to invent a weapon which could match the Hsiung Nu arrows. This weapon, which finally gave the Chinese superiority, was the cross-bow, of which we have archæological finds from the Han period. There seems no doubt that it was a Chinese invention, which much later reached Europe. The cross-bow gives a much greater penetrating power to the dart it shoots than the ordinary bow and arrow. It is, on the other hand, rather a heavy weapon to carry, and more easily fired from the ground than on horseback.

In order to find allies against the Hsiung Nu the Chinese sent envoys to the west, and these, who were almost explorers as well as ambassadors, travelled right across Asia with many dangers and delays, and made contact, at various times, with the Greek kingdoms which still ruled in North-West India, and with the Roman and Persian Empires. One consequence of their journeys was that the Han Emperors sent out armies which conquered the region of Central Asia now called Chinese Turkestan or Sinkiang, and a good part of what is now Russian Central Asia also. The Han histories, which are very full and detailed, give a long account of the western countries with which the envoys came into contact. From these accounts, in spite of the difficulty of finding the Latin or Greek equivalent to the name the Chinese give to a

place or person, it can now be shown that Chinese envoys must have visited the eastern Roman provinces, perhaps Rome itself, and that the information they recorded goes back to the period of the rule of Consuls in Rome, before Augustus.

Some vague knowledge, the first the Chinese ever had, of further lands, they also wrote down. Far to the west, says the Han history, there are lands where the sun shines all day, and there is no darkness. This might be thought to be just a legend, but if we remember that in ancient times sailors only ventured through the North Sea to Scandinavia and the Baltic in the height of summer, it is easy to see that the Chinese are really recording what they were told by travellers who had made these voyages during the season of the midnight sun. Some memory of great events in Greek history seems to have filtered through to China. Near a city which can be identified as Byzantium, the later Constantinople, the Chinese history records that "once there was a bridge over this narrow sea". This clearly refers to Xerxes' bridge of boats across the Hellespont, built during his invasion of Greece.

The Chinese also explored southwards, found India and the region of Indo-China. Indeed we know only what the Chinese tell us of the early history of this part of the world. In the later part of the Han dynasty there were Chinese garrisons on the northern side of the Karakorum range, on the frontier of what is now Pakistan, and these

were in touch with the last Greek rulers of the small kingdoms of North-West India which had survived from Alexander's conquests. On at least one occasion the Chinese sent a force to help one of these Greek kings in a local war. A bronze Han cross-bow cocking-piece was found in recent years at Taxila, in Pakistan, a silent proof that Chinese troops did enter this country.

The story of the Han Empire is thus, in its outside relations, also rather like Rome: conquests of nearer enemies, far-flung frontiers, distant relations with the other great Power at the opposite end of the known world.

At home the Han Empire was by far the strongest and most absolute monarchy that had yet been seen in China. In the old feudal days there had always been other states and other kings; if a man fell out of favour he could run away to some other Court. The kings, too, could marry the daughters of other rulers who were their equals, and who had no following in the king's own country. But now there was only one empire, beyond whose frontiers was only barbarism. It was almost impossible to fly from the wrath of the Han Emperor. Rebellion could be easily crushed, for most subjects and officers were loyal, and the penalty for aiding rebels, or even slackness in opposing them, was terrible.

The Emperor himself had now to take the daughters of his subjects, high officials though they might be, as his Empress and his concubines. This meant that the members of some family whose



(Above) New Stone Age painted pottery, c. 3000 B.C. (Shanghai Museum)

(Below) Bronze wine vessel, Shang Dynasty, c. 1100 B.C. (British Museum)





(Above) Stone sculpture, Han Dynasty (Nanking Museum)

(Below, left) Bronze dagger-axe, Chou Dynasty, c. 800 B.C. (author's collection)

(Right) Lacquer vessel, Han Dynasty, 206 B.C.-A.D. 220, from Ch'angsha, Hunan (Nanking Museum)



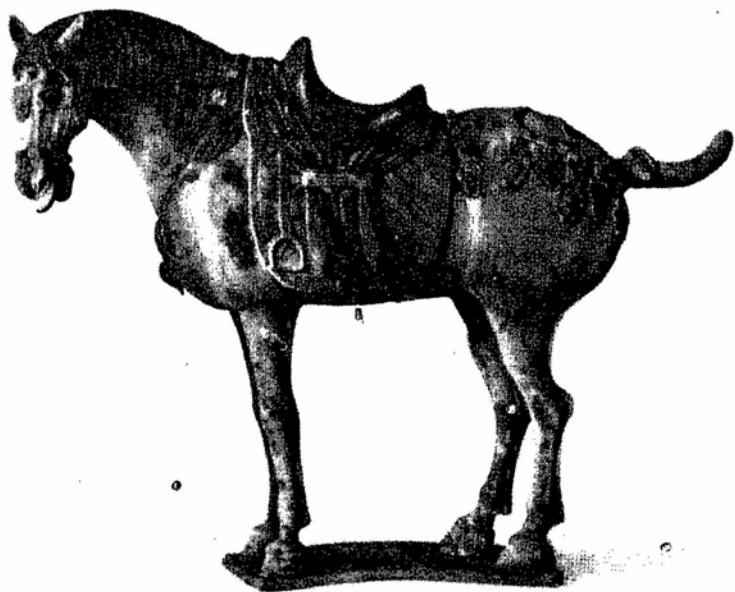
(Right) Buddhist rock sculptures at Lungmen, Hunan.
(T'ang Dynasty, A.D. 618-906)



(Left) Bronze mirror, T'ang Dynasty (Loyang Museum)

(Right) Bronze vessel, Chou Dynasty, c. 800 B.C. (author's collection)

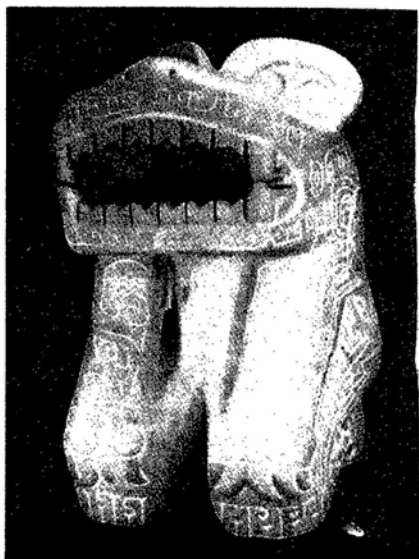




(Above) Pottery horse, grave figure, T'ang Dynasty, A.D. 618-906

(Below, left) Pottery camel, grave figure, T'ang Dynasty, A.D. 618-906
(both Shanghai Museum)

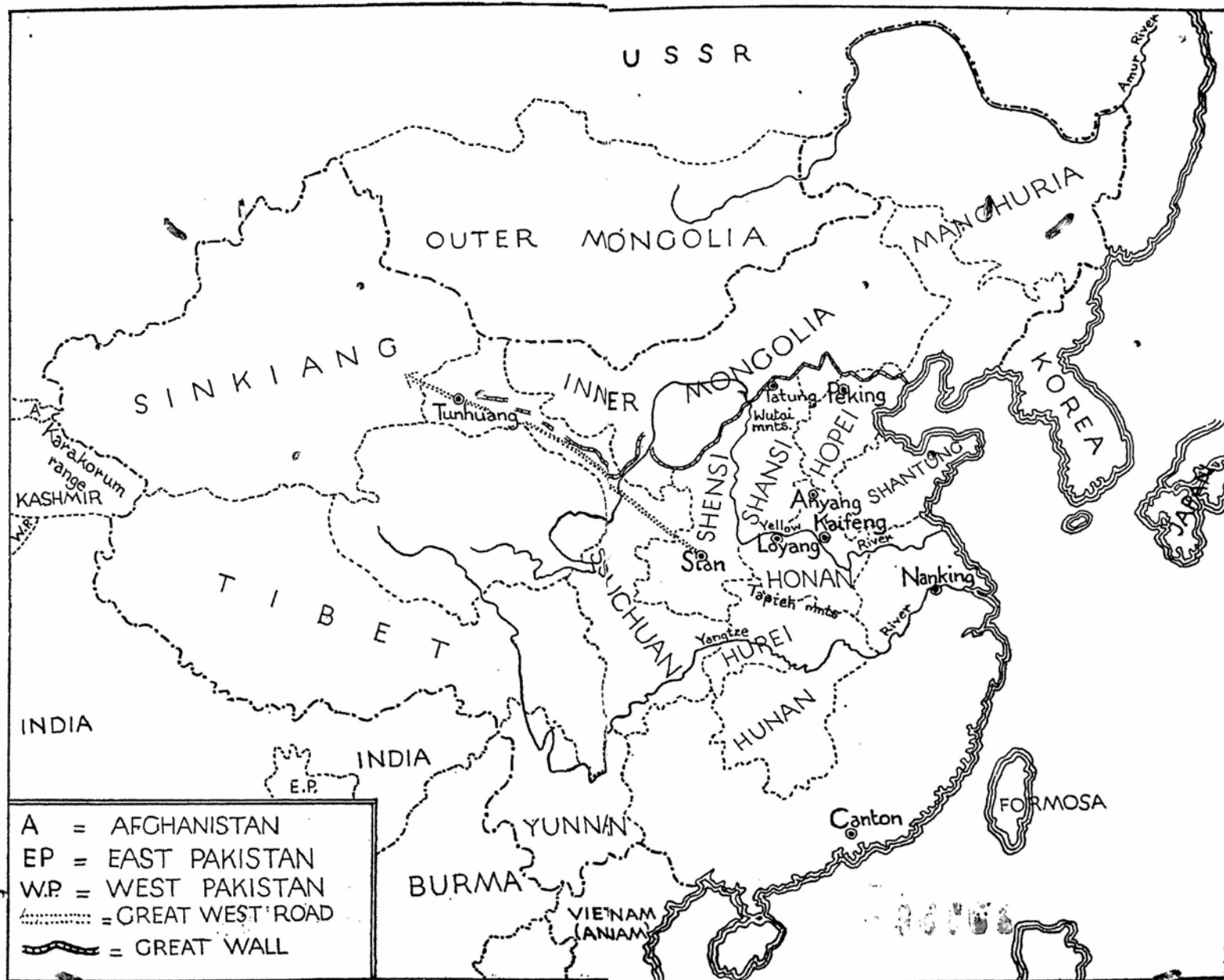
(Below, right) Stone sculpture of a tiger from Anyang, Shang Dynasty,
c. 1100 B.C. (Nanking Museum)



chief claim to fame was a very pretty daughter suddenly became the most important subjects in the empire. Their daughter was Empress; her son would be Emperor, her father would be the grandfather of the next Emperor, her brothers would be his uncles. These relationships gave them immense power and prestige, because in China everyone, even the Emperor, must respect his senior relatives, and listen to their advice.

It is easy to see that when the rewards of bearing the Emperor a son and heir were so great as this, there were endless intrigues at the palace to secure the favour of the sovereign or to disgrace a rival. Almost from the first reign, and with very rare exceptions, the Han Court was a prey to these intrigues, to the ambitions of the families of the empresses, and to the deadly enmity of those who coveted their power. As soon as a new Emperor came of age, and married, his wife's family began to grasp the most important offices of state and oust their predecessors. As soon as the Emperor was dead, the family of his mother no longer had any influence and were driven from office and put to death.

This sequence of affairs was only once interrupted in the first half of the Han dynasty, when the great Emperor Wu (140-86 B.C.) chose his heir as a young boy, and then put the child's mother to death so that her family could not acquire fatal power. No other Han Emperor made such a drastic solution. In the year A.D. 9 the family of the Empress Wang finally usurped



the throne itself from the child Emperor and tried to found a new dynasty. But this did not last long. Wang Mang, who founded it, was opposed by loyal Han supporters; a great flood of the Yellow River caused a famine and great suffering; the homeless refugees flocked to support his rival, the Han pretender, and everyone believed that Heaven had shown disapproval of the usurper. He was defeated and slain, and the Han dynasty restored. It then lasted for another hundred and ninety-six years, but the old trouble and ambition of the Empresses' families still persisted.

These troubles at Court, which did not usually lead to rebellion or civil war, left the country as a whole unaffected. Less ambitious officials could govern their provinces in peace, generals fought the frontier wars, merchants grew very rich and powerful, and a large class of educated people who now begin to be called the scholars, seem to have enjoyed a very favoured life. The old aristocracy of the feudal age had vanished in the final troubles of the warring states. The new official classes were not chosen because of ancient descent and family prestige, but for their ability and learning. It was not yet the practice to choose officials by a public examination, as came about in later centuries. In Han times high officials recommended men for office, and although this system led to many abuses and much favouritism, it worked fairly well, as it was unwise to put an incompetent man into a post

at which he would disgrace himself and his patron. One test was always important; the candidate for office must be a man of education, able to read and write, study the Confucian classics and know history. China was never ruled by unlettered nobles who could not sign their own names, as was often the case in mediæval Europe.

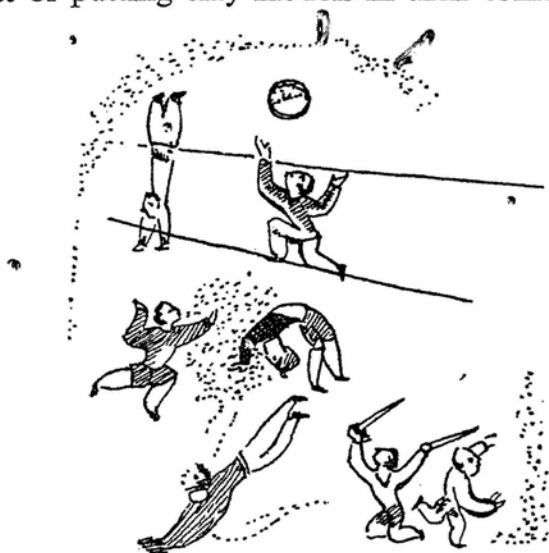
From the many Han tombs which have been discovered more or less intact we know something of how this leisured governing class lived. They decorated their tombs (and probably their houses also) with murals and with reliefs cut in stone, which sometimes show historical scenes, sometimes Court life, or amusements and banquets. There are also scenes showing gods, spirits and myths, some of which are not at all well known from literature. In the early Han period Confucian teaching was not yet established as the official belief and doctrine. Many strange gods, originating in all parts of the great empire, were favoured for a time at Court. Taoism, the doctrine of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu, which had many mystical beliefs and favoured magic and alchemy, was much more popular than the realist and practical Confucian teaching.

Gradually the Confucians, mainly because they paid so much attention to education, historical learning and practical methods of government, gained greater power. As the educated class were the officials of the empire and the ministers at Court, their views, which

were formed by Confucian teachers, came to prevail, until Confucian doctrine was made the official teaching for the empire. The Han scholars had made great efforts to recover all the lost literature from the past, before the burning of the books by Shih Huang Ti. They pieced together ancient fragments and edited new collections of the old writings. It is now very hard to be sure how far this work was a real reconstruction of the old books, and how far it was new, and this subject is still very much disputed by scholars in China and elsewhere. But the Han historians, who were the first to write large connected works covering a long period and the whole country, were the real founders of history in China. Their works still survive and give us a detailed account of the Han period, and what they could find out of what went before, which is by far the most complete record of an ancient society now existing in the world.

To judge from their tomb pictures the Han gentry were not by any means all serious scholars. We have scenes of dancing, musical entertainments, chariot races and horsemen going out to hunt. The hunting scenes are very vivid with mounted archers chasing deer, hares and leopards, among other animals. Many details of dress, furniture, musical instruments and architecture are shown in these pictures. From them it is clear that Chinese houses were even then already made on the courtyard pattern which has lasted till today, with curving roofs, and in the

case of great mansions flanking towers like very slim pagodas. In addition to murals and reliefs the Han Chinese carried on a custom which seems to have begun in the later Chou period, that of putting clay models in their tombs. The

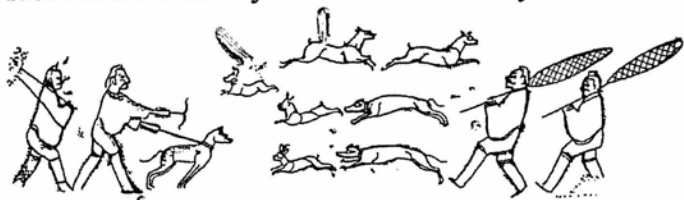


Acrobats and jugglers—from a Han dynasty relief

belief was that by magic power these models became in fact the things they represented, so that the spirit of the dead person enjoyed their use in the after-world.

In ancient times, as we know from the Shang royal tombs, slaves were sacrificed at the funeral so that their spirits could wait on and serve the deceased king in the after-life. Chariots and horses were also buried with the king. In Han

times this ancient custom had become more humane and civilized; now clay models of the servants and attendants, the horses, chariots, houses and furniture were buried with the dead. As it was obviously easier to make clay models of

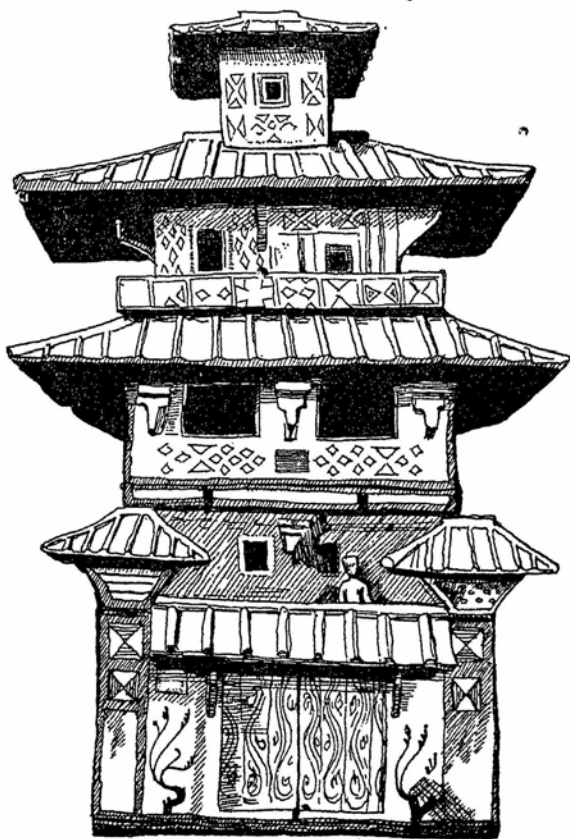


Hunters, Hounds and Quarry, from a Han dynasty relief

buildings and large objects than to bury the things themselves, the Han Chinese began to elaborate this "tomb furniture" till in the burials of powerful people almost everything they could have used, and every sort of attendant and servitor, was modelled for the spirit's enjoyment after death.

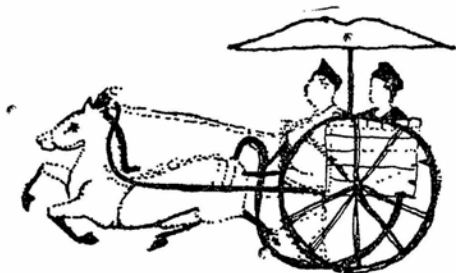
Archæological discoveries are now bringing to light many untouched tombs with these rich collections of models which give details of life and customs, styles in dress and architecture which cannot be found in the surviving literature. Some of the Han buildings were in the form of towers, with many storeys like a pagoda, but the ends of the roof supported by dragons, human figures or those of animals. On these towers cross-bow men were stationed as guards. No Han imperial tomb has been found intact. Indeed, the sites of all have been known for

centuries, by the vast mounds of earth, now bare of trees, which cover the tomb chamber. But all were robbed many hundreds of years ago, and although it is probable that excavation would reveal some interesting examples of sculpture too heavy for the robber, to move, such an



Clay model of a tower from a Han dynasty tomb

excavation has not yet been made. So all that we know of the Han from archæology comes from the tombs of much less important people than emperors. Yet this proves the very high standard of art and craftsmanship which must have prevailed all over the empire. Magnificent gold ornaments, most delicately worked, finely



Chariot, from a Han dynasty relief

painted lacquer ware, elaborate models of buildings, and others showing elegant women, warriors in armour, light fast chariots, and the high-spirited horses which Han literature tells us were imported from Central Asia. Pottery has been found in such tombs which is so advanced in technical skill that some experts would rather look upon it as the beginnings of porcelain. Many of these luxurious objects come from tombs in North Korea or in the north-eastern provinces (Manchuria), areas which in Han times were on the remote frontiers hundreds of miles from the capital at Ch'angan. It is evident that the ruling class had a high standard of comfort no matter where they lived.

The art of the Han period is purely Chinese: at that time Buddhism, which later brought many foreign artistic ideas to China, had not been introduced from India. There is no reason to think that Han art owed anything to foreign borrowing. The myths and the historical stories which Han artists illustrated are all taken from Chinese tradition, and consequently anything found in Han art, even when also found much later in time, can be recognized as a Chinese motif. There was really no country from which the Chinese could then have borrowed much even had they wished to. They had only very slight contact with western Asia, and influences from those countries did not become important in China till after the Han period. Japan was still primitive, and relations with China very rare. India the Han discovered, but during the dynasty they had very little communication with India.

This isolation at a time when Chinese civilization itself was so advanced had a lasting effect on China and the minds of the people. To them the Han dynasty, so great, so civilized and so enduring, owed nothing to "outer barbarians". It proved, to generations of later Chinese, that China could get along very well by herself, that the foreigner had nothing to offer better than what was found at home, that China was the only civilized country in the world. These ideas lasted long after they ceased to be true. When Buddhism came to China it was for centuries

attacked and condemned because it was foreign; because in Han times and earlier it had not been known. Believing in the Golden Age of the mythical rulers of the earliest times, Yao and Shun, who were supposed to have lived and ruled all China with perfect wisdom about three thousand years B.C., the later Chinese were really imagining a past partly shaped on the reality of the great Han Empire, which did rule their known world. Essentially this was a Chinese world, with only barbarian neighbours.

Gradually the power of Han declined. Emperors who were foolish, lazy, or young children succeeded to the vigorous monarchs who had built the empire. The troubles from the ambitions of the empresses' families continued right to the end of the dynasty. Economic difficulties, famines and droughts disturbed the tranquillity of the empire and there were great peasant revolts, the first of which we hear in China. Most of these disorders were confined to the northern provinces.

South China was at that time still only a sparsely inhabited, recently conquered country in which many barbarian peoples still dwelt under Han rule. The real strength and population of the Han lay in the basin of the Yellow River. The Yangtze valley, the former kingdom of Ch'u, was indeed a civilized region, but far less populous than the northern provinces. The Han Emperors abolished the old feudal system, but not quite as drastically as Shih Huang Ti of the

Ch'in dynasty. At first they created kingdoms, all fairly small, and gave these to the brothers and younger sons of the imperial family. But these rulers were strictly supervised by imperial officials, frequently degraded, and the feudal states themselves were sandwiched among "commanderies" under direct imperial rule, so that rebellion or alliance between rebellious states was made difficult. Then they made the kings divide their states among all their sons at every change of ruler and in this way the number of states increased, but their importance rapidly faded away. By the end of the dynasty these fiefs are rarely mentioned and had become little more than large estates.

In A.D. 184 the oppressive government of the corrupt Court and the misery of the people led to a great peasant revolt, called the rebellion of the Yellow Turbans, because the rebels wore these as their headgear and distinguishing mark. For years the empire was devastated by this war, and a huge imperial army was raised to suppress it. In the end the Court was victorious, but could no longer control the army and its generals. These struggled for supreme power among themselves, and finally dethroned the Han Emperor and divided China into three kingdoms, which were constantly at war.

The Three Kingdoms are famous to the Chinese because one of the best-known novels, based on heroic tales much older, has been written about this period. It is something like

the Knights of King Arthur, partly real history, but with many romantic and exciting adventures added in. After thirty-six years of constant war (A.D. 222-265) one of the Three Kingdoms conquered the others and for a time seemed likely to restore the unified Empire of the Han. But this Tsin dynasty mismanaged the government, proved unable to organize defence against the northern barbarians, and after fifty-two years was overwhelmed in A.D. 316 by a great invasion of the Tartars, who seized all North China. The Tsin fled south to Nanking beyond the Yangtze, and China was divided into two states, Tartar conquerors ruling in the north, Chinese dynasties in the south. This division was to last for two hundred and eighty-nine years.

CHAPTER FOUR

Buddhist China

WHEN THE TARTAR invaders captured the Tsin dynasty capital at Ch'angan, in A.D. 316, the north of China was overrun by the conquerors and only the region south of the Yangtze valley was saved for the Chinese Emperors. In many ways this great invasion was very like the invasions of the German tribes which overran the Roman Empire some sixty years later. The invaders were barbarians, without a written language; skilled cavalry, but nomads who had never built cities or tilled the soil. Only a very few of their leaders had some touch of Chinese learning. Therefore, although their military skill and courage were sufficient to defeat the Tsin armies and conquer that part of the country which was most suitable for cavalry warfare, the great northern plains, they had no experience of governing a great and civilized state and no organization which made it possible for them to carry on long campaigns and capture strong cities if these were properly defended.

When the Tartar invasion reached the wet rice

lands of the Yangtze valley, bad country for horsemen, and found there great cities with water-moats on the river which could be supplied by boats, they came to a stop. They could not fight in this country, they could not take the cities; presently they retired to the plains beyond the mountains which mark the northern watershed of the Yangtze. These mountains are called in Chinese Ta Pieh Shan, which means Great Difference Mountains. The "great difference" is between the south side, all rice-fields, a warm humid climate; where men travel much by boat and little by road, wear straw sandals and live in thatched houses made of bamboo-woven wattle; and the north side where the country is flat and dry, wheat is grown instead of rice, men ride horses and mules, boats are rarer and shoes are worn, cottages are made of brick with tiled roofs, and the winter wind is cold. The Chinese held the wet south, the Tartars ruled the dry north, and so it was for two hundred and seventy-three years.

The invaders did not understand much about government. They had to rely on Chinese officials, who were not trusted and often were not loyal. The kings and would-be emperors of the Tartar dynasties were not able men, hardly one of them is remembered as a great ruler, although many were warlike. They failed to unite the north under one dynasty. During most of this period it was divided between two or more states constantly at war with each other. No

dynasty lasted for more than a few generations. Disorder and treason were constantly causing new rebellions and overthrowing short-lived dynasties.

The south under the Chinese dynasties was only a little better. It was for most of the time a united state, under one government, but these dynasties were also rather short and weak. The Chinese succeeded in repulsing all attempts to conquer the south, but they had no success in trying to reconquer the north. South China was still thinly inhabited, and although thousands of refugees fled across the Yangtze when the north was lost, the two halves of China were still very unequal in population.

On the other hand, the Tartars were not a huge mass of people outnumbering their subjects. They seem indeed to have been only a small warlike minority, an army rather than a nation, and they quickly became absorbed in the great numbers of Chinese who still held the land. Population was of course much smaller than in later centuries, but it is likely that there were some twenty million or more Chinese in North China, perhaps half as many in the south. The whole strength of the Tartar peoples who invaded China was not more than a million at most. Gradually the Tartar overlords mixed with the Chinese official families until by the sixth century nothing much except the names distinguished one group from the other.

In South China the empire, with Nanking as

capital, had its greatest strength on the lower Yangtze, a region of great fertility and not often subject to drought or flood. Conquests and colonization of the far south continued. Almost all the oldest monuments, temples and many of the cities of the south date from this period. North and south were both weak, government was far less effective than in the Han Empire, local landowners or military chiefs had great power, and sometimes could hand it on to their sons, but no true revival of feudalism came about. This may be because there was still a large class of officials who clung to the remains of the old Civil Service and tried to keep its traditions alive; they would not yield to feudal tendencies and gave the emperors support against local chiefs. In China, unlike Europe, the barbarian conquest was not so thorough that a "dark age" arrived, with the loss of the old literature and the collapse of learning. The Chinese of that time could still read and write as well as ever, they kept their history recorded and wrote much very famous poetry.

It was in this society that Buddhism now began to make rapid progress. Here again the rise of Buddhism in the Chinese Period of Division between north and south has been compared to the spread of Christianity in the early Middle Ages, but there are many important differences. Christianity was already the official religion before the Roman Empire fell, but Buddhism in China, although known in the

later Han dynasty, had only made slight progress. In Europe the Christian Church and the monasteries became in the dark age the last refuge of literature and learning; in China there was no dark age and the main stream of literature and learning was not influenced by Buddhism for a very long time after it had come to China. Christianity almost took over the running and ordering of the fallen society of Europe after Rome had collapsed; but in China the Buddhists were not encouraged to take an interest in the affairs of this world, did not do so, and left the state to the officials, who may have been, some of them, Buddhist in belief, but were still trained as Confucians. •

The first Buddhists to arrive in China, in about A.D. 60, came from India, the home of the new faith, and it was many centuries before Chinese Buddhism could stand on its feet and get along without Indian teachers. It was more than two hundred years later, in A.D. 286, that the first good translation of the Indian scriptures was made by monks, who, though Indian, had lived from early life in China and really understood the language. The two languages are very different (Sanskrit and Chinese) and it needed great learning and skill to make accurate translations. All this is very unlike the history of Christianity in the centuries after the life of Christ.

Buddhism was a foreign religion, brought to China by missionary monks very much as, but

much more slowly than, Christianity was to reach China eighteen hundred years later. The fact of the foreign nature of Buddhism is shown very clearly in the earliest works of art which have survived from the period when Buddhism was growing important. At Yunkang in the northern province of Shansi, near the city of Tat'ung, there is a group of famous cave temples dating from the early fifth century A.D. At that time Tat'ung was the capital of one of the kingdoms founded by the Tartar invaders, and it lies on the northern frontier of China, close to the Great Wall. The Yunkang temples were founded by the rulers of this Wei state and decorated with reliefs and sculpture, much of which is still intact.

All the early sculpture at Yunkang shows strong foreign influence, and there are hardly any inscriptions in Chinese. The Buddha is shown in the style of an Indian god, or even of a Greek god, making the same gestures, and wearing much the same robes. In some sculptures there are even such motifs as the trident, the sign of the Greek god Poseidon, which has here got into the hands of Buddha. It is very clear that the sculptors at Yunkang, at least in its early days, were not Chinese, and that they brought with them through Central Asia the styles and ideas which they had used in their former homes, probably North-West India.

There are also many reliefs which show the dedication of temples by royal patrons, with the whole Court assembled bearing gifts and guarded



Wei period sculpture at Yunkang, showing Buddha with winged head-dress and carrying a trident

by the royal soldiers. From these reliefs it can be seen that in Wei times, the fifth century, costume was also strongly influenced by foreign ways. The styles of dress are not those of earlier Han China, nor even the same as the costume being worn at this same time in South China., The style of drawing, long willowy figures,

graceful and curving, is also quite unlike the style prevailing in Han and South China. It seems certain that this northern style, perhaps originally foreign, was continued as a tradition for some centuries in the north, for in later Wei reliefs we find inscriptions in Chinese and other signs that the artists were now Chinese. The Yunkang temples were added to and enlarged for about three hundred years, but the later work already shows fast-increasing Chinese influence and style.

The Chinese, both north and south, in this period continued the Han custom of burying clay models of things and persons in their tombs. Perhaps it is natural that in this very disturbed and warlike age many of the tombs have figures of guardian warriors, in full armour, modelled with great detail. These fierce bearded men look as if they were meant to represent foreign soldiers, for neither the Chinese nor the Tartars themselves grew much hair on the face. The armour they wore seems to be what is called "laminated", that is to say, small pieces of metal sewn on to thick felt undercoats so that it is flexible and not so heavy as either chain armour or the plate armour worn in the Western Middle Ages. The soldiers also wear trousers (not formerly a Chinese garment) and these are tied up beneath the knees. This style of uniform can be seen on many Wei reliefs and grave figures; it seems certain that they were cavalrymen. As might be expected, there are also

magnificent models of the horses they rode, proud high-spirited steeds, rather broad in the body, strong enough to carry a heavy man in armour.

Apart from tomb models and Buddhist sculpture there is very little that survives of the art and remains of the Wei dynasty and its northern rivals. In Buddhist sculpture their work is regarded as the finest of all ages, for the early sculptors worked when Buddhism was a very strong faith in which all earnestly believed. Wei heads of the Buddha are more spiritual than those made in later times. Although Buddhism was also spreading strongly in the south, there are no surviving shrines of such sculpture as Yunkang in the southern region. Some of the great temples of South China, near Nanking and near Hangchow, were founded at this period, and a few pieces of early sculpture are preserved there. But the original buildings have long since been destroyed and rebuilt, often several times. On the whole, it seems as if the art of Buddhist sculpture was much stronger and more lasting in the north.

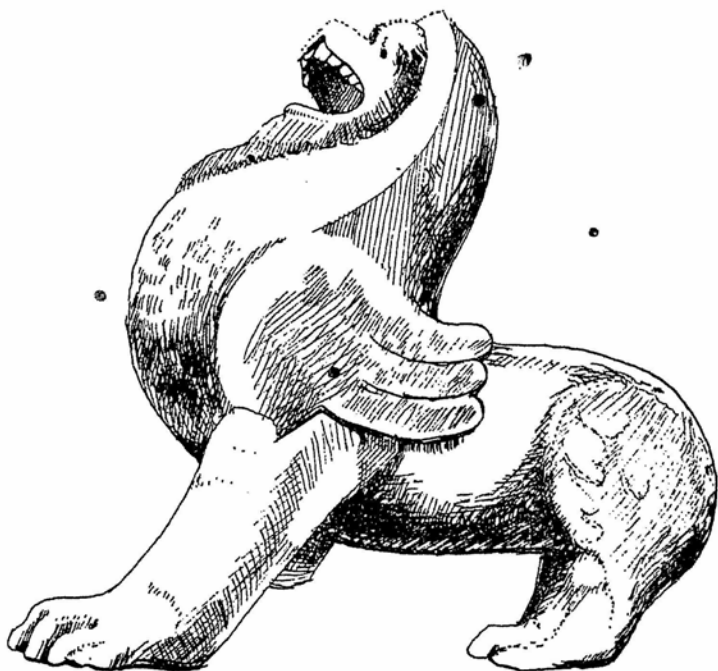
In the southern empire the old Chinese arts carried on with less foreign influence. It is from this period that we have the earliest surviving paintings on silk, only three or four, but well preserved considering their very great age. One of these, by the artist K'u K'ai-chih, is in the British Museum. Two others by the same artist are in the Palace Museum at Peking. The sub-

jects of all these paintings are Court ladies and gentlemen, and some are portraits. They are shown wearing elaborate flowing robes, very different to the straight clinging robes of the Wei figures. The style of hair-dressing is much closer to what we now think of as Japanese. In this period, as in earlier times, the Chinese sat on mats on the floor, as they are shown doing in some of these pictures, and therefore the furniture of their rooms was also very like that of Japan in later times. For the Japanese, some centuries later than this, copied the Chinese fashions in all these things.

Although the southern empire is not so rich in Buddhist sculpture as the north, it was fervently Buddhist. One of the best known and longest lived of the southern emperors, the Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty (502-549), was such an ardent Buddhist that he three times renounced the throne and became a Buddhist monk. He did not in fact intend to give up his authority, but he made the people pay great sums to the Buddhist church to release him from his vows so that he could resume the throne. This might have been accepted if he had done it only once, but the repeated demand exasperated the nobles and officials, a revolt broke out and the Emperor Wu died, aged eighty-six, with his capital in rebel hands.

Very little archæological discovery has yet been made in South China relating to the time of the southern empire. Part of the walls of

Nanking, the capital, do date from this age, but most of the work has so often been repaired and changed that little of the original remains. Near



Stone lion at the Liang dynasty tombs near Nanking

Nanking there are the tombs of the Liang emperors and princes, which have not been excavated, but which were approached by an avenue of gigantic stone lions, some of the finest pieces of Chinese sculpture in existence. Only three or four now stand fully clear of the soil,

for as the area has been wet rice-lands for centuries, most of the massive sculptures have sunk almost out of sight into the ground.

Nanking was certainly then a most magnificent and luxurious city, concentrating all the wealth of the southern empire, perhaps almost the equal in size of the Han Loyang. The modern city covers most of the area which was inhabited at that time, and although some streets follow the same lines, and various waterways and canals can be identified with those mentioned in the literature of the Liang and other southern dynasties, there are no surviving buildings. The great Buddhist temples are known by their position and the fact that later, much less magnificent temples have kept the same sites, rebuilt when the earlier ones were destroyed. In the north where the land is more open it was usually easier to rebuild a ruined city on a neighbouring clear site, but in South China where flat land is rarer and the rice-lands very valuable, the cities have constantly been rebuilt on the same sites, so that all the ancient remains are buried beneath later work.

The Wei dynasty, which in the north was the most powerful and enduring, moved its capital southward in the fifth century and settled at Loyang. Near this city they then started a new series of cave temples at Lungmen, the "Dragon Gate", a pass through the hills about five miles from Loyang. The rock here is harder than at Yunkang and the sculpture is therefore better

preserved. The Lungmen caves are the second great treasury of Chinese Buddhist sculpture which continued to be enlarged and added to for about three hundred years, until the end of the eighth century. During this time style gradually



Wei period Court ladies at the dedication of a Buddhist temple

changed from the austere Wei manner, became much more human, until the Bodhisattvas, or Buddhist saints and immortals, were represented as beautiful women in flowing robes decked with jewellery. By that time the style and character was wholly Chinese, and the artists, working for the Court of a new dynasty, the T'ang, were

really representing Court ladies rather than spiritual beings.

The Chinese in the south, and the foreign rulers in the north, never gave up the hope of conquering the other half of China and restoring the united empire. Several northern expeditions were made, but all failed. Once at least the southern counter-attack reached the Yellow River, but could not hold it. It seemed as if the partition of China would be permanent, and that gradually two separate nations would grow from this division. But in the north the Tartar rulers were now very much intermarried with Chinese families who had risen to power and influence. The whole of the ruling class was becoming a composite group with connections from both races, and the Tartar language had fallen into disuse. By the later part of the eighth century there was no longer any real difference between Chinese and those of Tartar descent.

After the fall of the Wei dynasty in A.D. 543 the north fell into chaos, short dynasties which only ruled part of the country succeeded each other, the families who seized the throne for a few years were all interrelated, and even though all were supposed to be of Tartar descent, all were connected with powerful Chinese families on the female side. In 581 one of the Chinese ministers of the last Tartar dynasty, called Northern Chou, usurped the throne from his Tartar father-in-law and founded the Sui dynasty, the first Chinese house to rule in the north for

nearly three hundred years. Seven years later he conquered the southern empire and reunited China. There is no doubt that he achieved this so easily largely because, as a Chinese, he was not regarded as a foreign enemy by the people of the south.

One very important consequence of the spread of Buddhism in the period of the north and south was that the Chinese became better acquainted with the countries of western Asia, and particularly India. India was the holy land of Buddhism. It was there that, nearly a thousand years before, Gautama Buddha had lived and taught. Although by this time Buddhism was declining in the land of its birth, there were still important and active centres of the faith, especially in the north-west, a region which later became almost entirely Mohammedan. Chinese pilgrims made the long journey to India to see the land of Buddha and to bring back authentic copies of the sacred books. They travelled across Central Asia from North-West China along the route which in Han times had carried the Chinese silks to markets in Persia and the eastern Roman Empire. The pilgrims, however, turned southwards, through what is now Afghanistan, which seems to have been at least partly a Buddhist country then, and so reached North-West India, or what is now Pakistan.

Probably most of them came back the same way, but the story of one traveller has been preserved, a monk named Fa Hsien, who left

Ch'angan in North-West China in A.D. 399, travelled through to Afghanistan and India, and fifteen years later sailed home from a port in Bengal, and so reached China by the sea route. This is one of the first proofs we have that this sea route from India was in regular use. It would seem, although Fa Hsien does not make it quite clear, that the ship on which he travelled was a Chinese one.

Rather earlier than this, in the later part of the Han dynasty, in A.D. 166, the Chinese had recorded an embassy from Rome which arrived by sea, although they seem to have been rather doubtful as to whether the travellers were really ambassadors and not just merchants claiming that rank. Later, in the Three Kingdoms period, after the fall of the Han, another embassy also arrived in eastern China from Rome. It seems certain that in both these cases, and there may have been several others which were not recorded, the travellers made the long journey along the southern coast of Asia in their own ships, probably Greek ships from one of the ports on the Egyptian coast of the Red Sea. We have as yet very little, if any, archaeological evidence of this trade between Rome and China by sea, but a certain amount of literary evidence that it did exist.

India became comparatively well known to the Chinese as a consequence of the Buddhist pilgrims and the missionary monks from India. For the first time in their history the Chinese

became aware of a foreign language, Sanskrit, which was not just a barbarous tongue without literature, but the language of a high civilization and a sacred teaching, to which they themselves were attracted. The difficulties of translating abstract ideas from Sanskrit to Chinese, with their utterly different grammar and methods of writing, trained the Chinese in a new branch of learning and made a deep impression on their culture.

Buddhism did not have altogether a smooth passage in China. The Confucian scholars disapproved of it, and the Taoists, the followers of the Chinese native mystical religion and teaching, which was very influential in the southern empire, especially, were bitterly opposed. In A.D. 446 the Emperor of the Wei dynasty was persuaded to issue an edict persecuting the Buddhists, but the southern Emperor received them with open arms. More than once, other, minor persecutions were started, one reason being the great increase in monks and nuns, who renounced the world and their family ties and obligations. Many Chinese scholars thought this attitude wrong and even immoral. Sometimes they succeeded in obtaining imperial edicts forcing the monks and nuns to return to the world and to marry each other.

These troubles never lasted long, and the religion spread steadily throughout the country, north and south alike. In the beginning of the fifth century the historians of the time say that

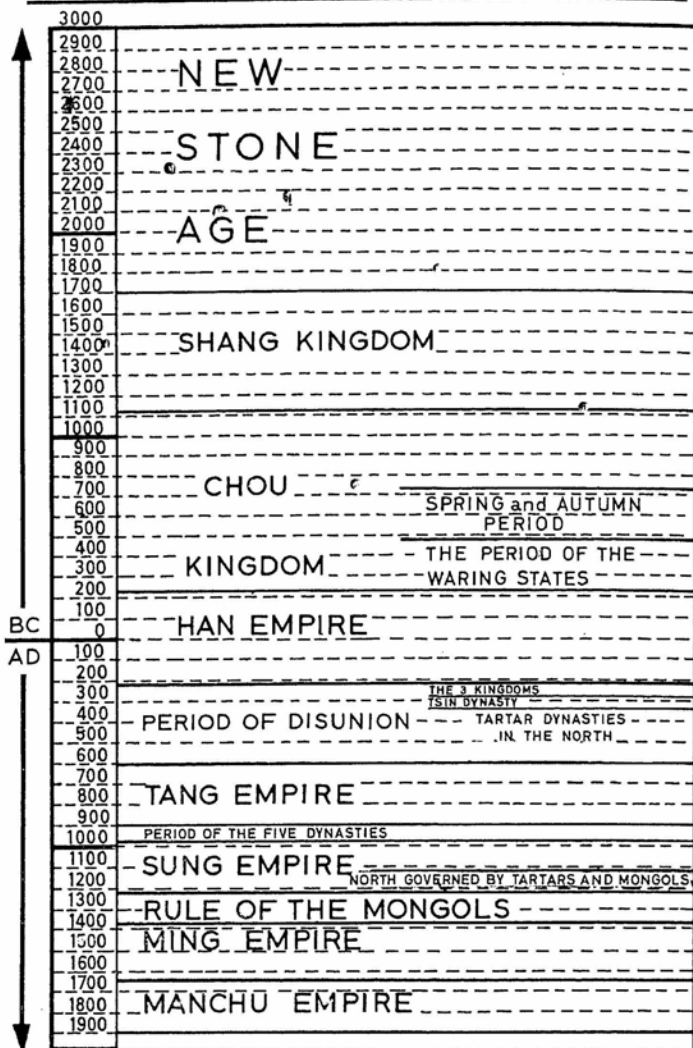
in the northern empire nine out of ten families were Buddhist, and one hundred years later it is said that the whole country, north and south alike, could now be said to be wholly Buddhist; temples and monasteries had been built in every district, everyone followed Buddhist rites at weddings and funerals. Yet the conversion was not quite so complete as this description would make one think. The Taoists did not disappear, and their system continued, right down to modern times, in competition with Buddhism. The Confucian scholars, weak in the period of division, grew stronger in later centuries* and opposed Buddhism throughout. The Chinese, unlike the Europeans, did not feel that if you believed in one religion you must disbelieve in all others. They rather thought there was probably some good in them all, it could do no harm to pay service to all the gods, and be on the safe side. Buddhism never actually taught that the gods of Hinduism did not exist, but only that they were not the best helpers to salvation. So Buddhism in China did not deny the other religions, it merely ignored them. This left it possible for the others to revive and continue until Buddhism itself had no longer such a strong hold upon the Chinese people.



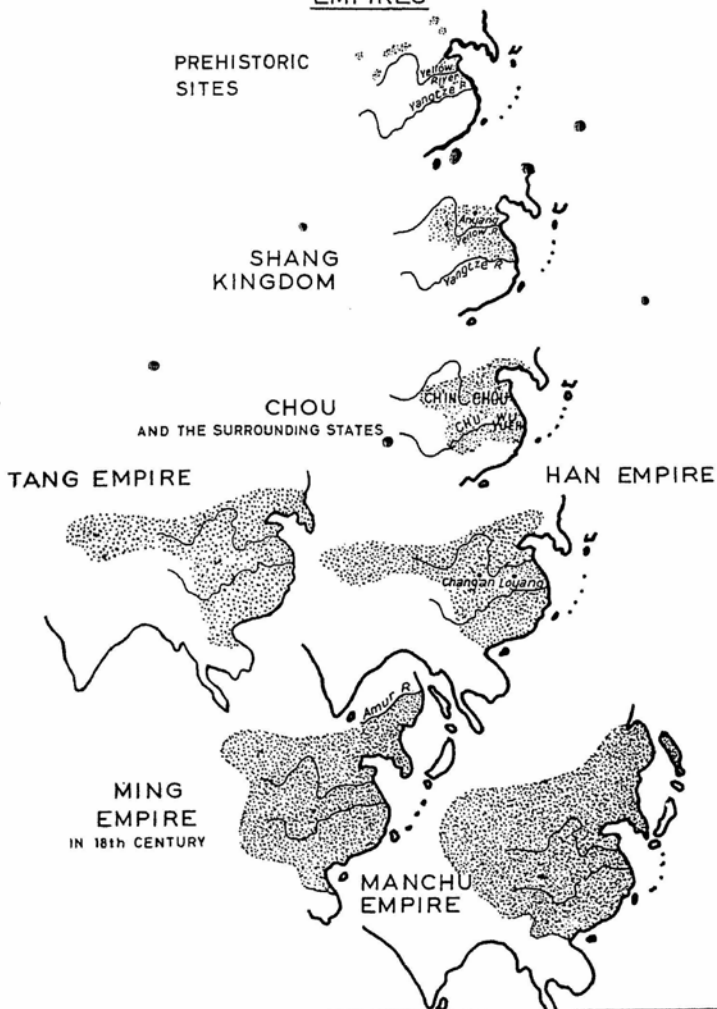
(Above, left) Warrior, grave figure, T'ang Dynasty, A.D. 618-906
(Nanking Museum)

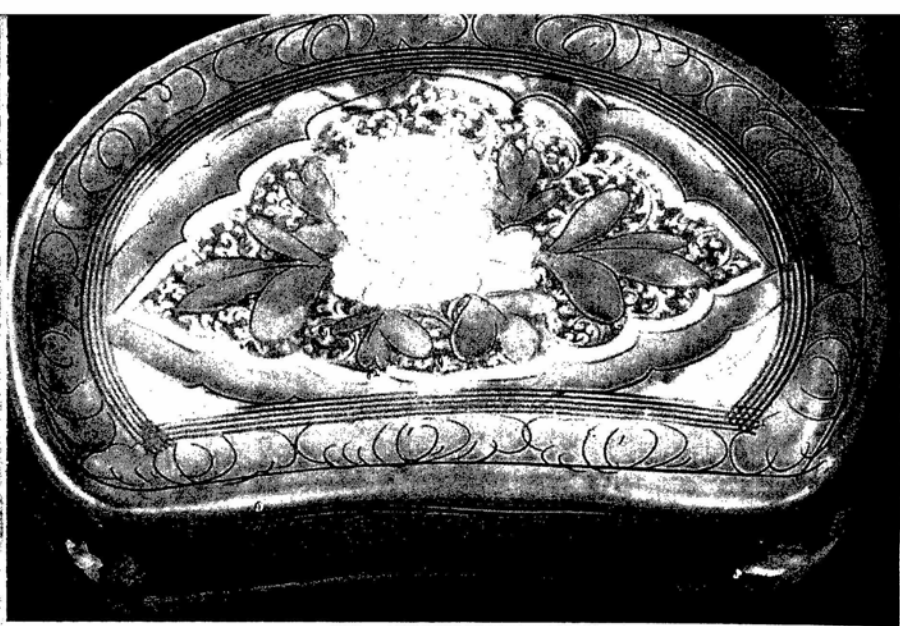
(Above, right) Tartar, grave figure, T'ang Dynasty, A.D. 618-906
(Shanghai Museum)

FOUR THOUSAND YEARS OF CIVILIZATION



A CHART SHOWING THE APPROXIMATE RELATIVE
DURATION AND EXTENT OF THE SUCCESSIVE
EMPIRES





(Above) Porcelain pillow, Sung Dynasty, A.D. 960-1278

(Below) The White Horse Monastery, Loyang. Founded in T'ang Dynasty, restored in Ming Dynasty, A.D. 1368-1644 (both Loyang Museum)



CHAPTER FIVE

The Second Empire

IN A.D. 589 THE ruler of the northern, but Chinese, Sui dynasty conquered the southern empire and reunited China. But his dynasty did not last; after twenty-nine years widespread revolts brought it down, caused by the extravagance and unpopularity of the second Sui Emperor, and in particular by his unsuccessful invasions of Korea. It seemed as if the reunion of the empire would be only a temporary triumph, and that the country was going to be divided once more. This was prevented by the conquests and ability of one of the rival rebel leaders who fought over the fallen empire of the Sui.

Li Shih-min, known by his reign title as T'ai Tsung, who was the second Emperor of the T'ang dynasty, but its true founder, is the man whom all Chinese historians would agree best fulfilled the ideal of what a Chinese Emperor should be. In six years he suppressed all his enemies and founded a new united empire, the T'ang. The system of administration was reorganized by him, on lines which lasted for more than a thousand years. His justice and moderation were

famous even in his own lifetime, and few of his successors can be compared with him in this respect. He was also a great patron of literature, and his own handwriting (which in China is regarded as an art) was so much admired that it is still used as a model in the schools.

The reunion of the empire under the T'ang, a reunion which was long lasting, and later restored by other dynasties, is the turning-point in Chinese history. Before that time only the Han dynasty had ruled the whole country for a long period. Division was the rule, union was the exception. After the T'ang union became the long-established rule, periods of division were short and few—and no one expected them to last or wished that they would. This has had very great consequences in China. Up to the T'ang period it was more likely than not that China would be permanently divided into at least two countries, North and South, perhaps more. In time these would have become two distinct nations, and might easily have divided again into other new nations. The story of China would have had a course more like that of Europe after the Roman Empire. Nation states would have grown up, having still some sort of common culture, but with varying languages, institutions and strong local patriotism. Reunion would have become more and more difficult, just as today Europe cannot be united.

What happened in China was the opposite. The old divisions gradually lost their import-

ance; although dialects persisted and some were very different from the others, the system of writing remained the same for all, the same books were read in all parts of the country, the same laws were in force, one government ruled everywhere. If Charlemagne had conquered all Europe including Constantinople, and passed this united empire on to a lasting efficient dynasty which could rule it as firmly as the Roman emperors of an earlier age had done, the history of Europe would have indeed followed much the same lines as that of China. It is not, of course, certain that what happened in China was for the best, or that a united imperial state is better than several individual states; but as it turned out, Imperial China was refounded by the T'ang, and lasted till modern times. In the sense that there is only one Chinese state, it lasts still.

The new empire was much the same in size as the empire of the Han. It included South China down to northern Vietnam, the region called Annam, which was a T'ang province. It did not include the south-west of what is now China, not all of the modern provinces of Yunnan and Kueichou, nor Tibet. Tibet at this time was a rather warlike and aggressive kingdom, not yet ruled by Buddhist monks, and during the T'ang dynasty it gave the Chinese much trouble on the wild borderland between Tibet and the empire. In the north the Chinese frontier was still the Great Wall. T'ai Tsung campaigned against the Turks who were then the dominant people

of the Mongolian steppe, and he made the nearer tribes submit to T'ang authority. The T'ang Empire also restored Chinese rule over Sinkiang or Chinese Central Asia, which the Han had first conquered, but which had been lost after that empire fell. T'ai Tsung tried to conquer Korea, but did not succeed. It was in the reign of his son and successor that the Chinese conquest of Korea was completed.

On the other hand the T'ang period saw the colonization of South China on a much larger scale than had hitherto occurred. This settlement of the far south in T'ang times caused the people of that region to think of themselves as essentially "men of T'ang", and to this day the Cantonese use the expression "men of T'ang" to mean Chinese, while other Chinese call themselves "Han". For over two hundred years the south of China under the T'ang was at peace, without major wars or rebellions; this had never happened for so long before, and it has never happened since.

The T'ang government was remarkably efficient for such an early period; it kept careful records of taxation returns and statistics of the population. Some of these have survived, at least in part, and for the year A.D. 754 there are full figures for the census return, which gave the population as 52,880,488 persons belonging to 9,069,154 families. It used to be thought that these figures must be approximate or estimates, or only men who paid taxes; but since a part of one of these

census returns was found in the manuscripts discovered at the cave temple of Tunhuang we know that actually the census was compiled from detailed local returns which gave the number of persons in each family, by name, children and adults. Government administration to this degree of thoroughness was unknown anywhere else in the world for many centuries to come.

It was in the T'ang dynasty that for the first time examinations for the Civil Service were started. In Han times men were recommended for office by patrons, and this system did not entirely disappear in the T'ang period. But one of T'ai Tsung's reforms was the beginning of this examination system which in later centuries became the main prop of the Civil Service, and was still later the model which the West adapted for their own civil services. One reason for this change was probably because the T'ang Emperors wished to reduce the power of the great official families who nominated their own supporters and clients to offices. In the period of division the Court was weak and these great families, both in north and south, very strong. The T'ang policy was to replace them gradually by men drawn from less influential classes, and the examination system was one sure way of recruiting these men. As the new kind of official depended almost entirely on the favour of the monarch, and not on patrons in powerful places, this change made the Emperor stronger and more absolute than before.

The dynasty was also fortunate in having three great rulers in succession at the start. T'ai Tsung was succeeded by a son, but this Emperor was a weakling who was ruled, and in the end actually succeeded, by his Empress, the Empress Wu, who controlled the government in one way and another for over fifty years. The Empress Wu was an able but ruthless character who usurped her son's throne and made herself sovereign. Never before, and also never since, has any woman sat on the throne of China. Yet irregular and scandalous though her usurpation was, and shocking to the historians who wrote of her times, they cannot conceal that she was very capable and that those whom she dethroned were incompetent. Without the Empress Wu the dynasty might have failed; by the time she died, the system of administration was so well established that it survived for more than two centuries.

She was succeeded, after a brief interval, by her grandson, to whom the Chinese gave the nickname of Ming Huang, the "Brilliant Emperor". His reign was long and for many years most prosperous and successful. The most famous poets who have written in China flourished at his Court. Art and skilled crafts reached new heights; it was at his Court that the Chinese drama first appeared. In almost every field of Chinese skill, art or literature some new form of real importance arose at the Court of Ming Huang. At the end of his life his love for

the beautiful concubine Yang Kuei Fei, whose extravagances and favouritism became intolerable, provoked a great rebellion. The capital, Ch'angan, was captured, the Emperor had to let the mutinous soldiers execute Yang Kuei Fei, and he fled, a broken old man, into exile. The rebellion was crushed, and Ming Huang regained his throne before he died. But the tragedy has never been forgotten, and is immortalized in one of the most famous poems in the Chinese language, called "The Everlasting Wrong", written by Po Chu-i, a statesman and poet who lived in the following generation.

The literature of the T'ang period is extensive. Not only a great collection of poetry, but also histories and other collections of ancient works, books on all subjects, and the first novels, or rather short stories, have come down from this great age. We also know more about how people lived from archæological discoveries, tombs and cave temple frescoes. The custom of placing clay models, "grave figures" as they are called, in tombs reached a new richness and elaboration. Many of the Han and later grave figures



Clay model of a Court lady
from a T'ang dynasty tomb

are quite small, but in the T'ang period they were often made nearly a quarter of life size. Perhaps because they are later in date the colours in which they were painted have often remained, and we can get some idea of the rich elaborate costumes, with frequently changing fashions, which were worn by Court ladies. One of the most characteristic developments in this art is the large number of foreigners who were modelled for the tombs. It seems that every wealthy family had Central Asians for grooms, Syrian dancers, Indian jugglers, and even some who must be negroes as servants and attendants. This is only one of a number of evidences for free and extensive contact between China and the rest of Asia, and beyond.

A very few T'ang paintings on silk have survived, but in addition to these there are a much larger number of mural paintings from the cave temples at Tunhuang and other places. Tunhuang is in a remote district in the far north-west of China, near the road to Central Asia. Yet in spite of this provincial locality the murals show a great variety of luxurious buildings, dresses, furnishings, and scenes from everyday life. If this was the standard of living on the frontier, it must have been high indeed at Court. From the few surviving paintings we do obtain a glimpse of the luxury and refinement of the Court. One such picture shows eight Court ladies and the Empress wearing dresses of the finest silk gauze with golden thread and exquisite

patterns, worn over rich silk brocades. The necks are cut low, a fashion which has not continued at all in later China.

About the middle of the T'ang period, in the ninth century, an important change began in Chinese living habits. Up till this time the Chinese had sat upon the floor, using mats, very much as the Japanese still do, for the Japanese borrowed this custom with many others from the early



Mural showing people seated on benches at table. T'ang dynasty

T'ang. But now for the first time there are pictures of people sitting on chairs. At first it seems as if this was a rather uncommon custom, and mainly used, perhaps only used, in the garden. But towards the end of the dynasty there are more frequent pictures and murals showing various types of couches and some chairs, until in the late tenth century we find that rooms were wholly furnished with chairs and tables; mats had quite gone out of use. From that time on the new custom spread rapidly, and in later centuries the Chinese have always used chairs. Nothing is yet known about how or why this change came about. At that time all the peoples of Asia right through to the borders of Europe sat on the floor on carpets or mats. Most of them still do so, or have only recently changed to chairs. So it is hard to see from where the Chinese can have got this idea. Unfortunately the literature of the period does not mention this change in any precise way, and the subject is still very obscure.

Although it is not clear whether the Chinese got the idea of chairs and raised furniture from some foreign source, it is well known that in the T'ang period they were in closer touch with western Asia and perhaps with eastern Europe than ever before. Early in the dynasty, in the reign of T'ai Tsung, Nestorian Christian monks from Syria, which at that date was still a part of the eastern Roman Empire, reached Ch'angan, the capital, and were allowed to preach their

religion and found a church. The story is told by the Nestorians themselves, who raised a large inscribed monument at the church, giving the full history of their enterprise in China up to the middle of the eighth century, when the church was restored and the monument set up. It still survives, now in the museum at Sian, the modern city on the site of Ch'angan.

The Nestorians, who were Christians of a sect separate from the Greek Orthodox Church, seem to have flourished in China for about three centuries, but declined after a great persecution of the foreign religions which occurred in A.D. 843. This was really directed against the Buddhists, who were very wealthy, and the Manicheans, who had the support of a people called the Uighurs, with whom the T'ang Court had then quarrelled. It seems that the Nestorians were persecuted along with the rest, perhaps because they had no powerful protectors.

We do not know how many of these Nestorian Christians were Chinese converts, or how many were resident western Asians, of whom there were large numbers in Ch'angan. But it seems probable that many of them were foreign merchants from western Asia. The Persian fire-worshippers (Zoroastrians) had also their temple in Ch'angan and a large community. These we know were mostly refugees from Persia itself, which had been conquered by the Moslem Arabs about the same time as the T'ang dynasty was established. The last King of Persia died in

exile in Ch'angan. His son, the Pretender to the Throne of Persia, lived in China all his life and tried, without much success, to get the T'ang Court, then ruled by the Empress Wu, to give him help to regain his throne. His son settled in China and was a general of the Palace Guards in the T'ang service. Apart from these eminent refugees, of whom history tells us something, there were many thousands of their followers and countrymen who settled in China. In the capital they were so numerous that they had their own quarter of the great city, with the "Persian Market", mentioned in the literature of the time.

In the middle T'ang period, the early ninth century, China was visited by many Arab travellers, from the great new Moslem empire of the Caliphs. It is probably mainly from them that the Chinese learned about the rise of Islam and the life of Mohammed, which are recounted in the T'ang histories, but in a rather inaccurate way. The Arabs also took home tales of China, which impressed them by its magnificence and power. They were surprised, too, to find that at Ch'angan the Emperor and his Court were quite well informed about the religions of western Asia, Islam, Christianity and Judaism. They knew about the story of the Flood, but told the Arab traveller that it was not correct, as the Flood had never covered China. This is certainly the first time that we have any evidence that educated Chinese knew something of the history and

traditions of the Western world. It is also from a little earlier, the reign of Ming Huang, in the eighth century, that we hear that a famous Chinese poet, Li Po, could speak Persian.

China was certainly visited by many foreigners in this period, and the grave figures prove that many were employed in all sorts of occupations by wealthy Chinese. We know that embassies came to China from Constantinople, and we can infer that Chinese embassies went there in turn. The reason for this exchange seems to have been that the Byzantine government was seeking an ally to take the Arabs in the rear, and thought that distant but powerful China might serve that purpose. The Chinese do not mention sending return embassies to Constantinople, but the T'ang history contains a description of that city which must be the work of an eye-witness. This is shown from the details he reports; and as he often did not understand what the meaning of the customs he observed was, it is clear that it is the account of a Chinese, not taken from a Greek of the city itself.

The T'ang visitor describes the Golden Gate, the Palace, and the progress the Byzantine Emperor made through the city. He also mentions how the inhabitants cooled their houses in summer by pouring water from the roofs down mats spread across the face of the house—a detail not known from any Western source. He observed that no work was done on every seventh day, but does not mention, probably did not

understand, the reason for this. The Chinese also knew that the empire ruled from Constantinople was the continuation of the old Roman Empire with which the Han had long-range intercourse. Byzantine gold coins have been found in China mainly in the north-west Chinese pottery of the T'ang period. The extent of the trade and travel must have been much greater than the short historical accounts suggest.



The Great Swallow Pagoda (Ta Yen T'a) at Ch'angan. A surviving T'ang dynasty building

Ch'angan was at this time the greatest city in the world, with the possible exception of Constantinople. In A.D. 742 the census records that the metropolitan district of Ch'angan, including an area slightly greater than the city itself, had a population of just under two millions. It is probable that more than half of these lived in the city. Today the ruins or the site of T'ang Ch'angan stretch for miles beyond the modern city. There are still standing two ancient pagodas, built in T'ang times, whose position in the old city is known; one is three, the other nearly five miles beyond the walls of Sian today. The city of Sian, built in its modern form in the Ming period (fourteenth century) covers only the area of the Palace City of the T'ang capital. Part of the present walls are those of the T'ang Palace City, which in turn enclosed the actual palace itself. There are maps, made in T'ang times, showing the city of Ch'angan as it then was. It was planned in a very modern manner, in squares, with streets running east and west, north and south, all straight.

Japan was at this time emerging as a civilized state, and the Japanese were eager to copy the manners and monuments of their great neighbour. The new Japanese imperial capital, the city of Kyoto, anciently called Heian, which in Chinese reading would be "P'ingan", meaning "Peaceful Tranquillity", was a direct copy of Ch'angan (meaning "Enduring Tranquillity"), and the layout of the streets of Kyoto today is

exactly on the plan of T'ang Ch'angan. Among the oldest Buddhist temples in Japan, in the neighbourhood of Kyoto and Nara, there are some which were built in the seventh century A.D. as exact copies of temples then standing in China. For many years these were believed to be the only examples of T'ang architecture apart from brick and stone pagodas which had survived.

Some years ago Chinese archæologists found that in the remote mountain region of Wu T'ai Shan, north-west of Peking, two T'ang temples were preserved intact. These, however, are dated as built in the middle of the ninth century, two hundred years later than the Horyuji temple near Nara. T'ang style did not differ very much from later Chinese architecture; the main points being that buildings were often raised on rather high stone bases or terraces, the faces of which were swept inwards in a graceful curve. This style is often shown in the mural paintings from the cave temples at Tunhuang. In Ch'angan itself, very little except a few monuments in stone and the two pagodas now remain. Among the inscribed stone tablets still preserved there is a series containing the complete text of the Confucian classics, engraved from the handwriting of the Emperor T'ai Tsung himself. This is the oldest text of the Confucian classics which has come down to us.

In the middle of the eighth century, towards the end of the reign of Ming Huang, a great rebellion,

led by a barbarian general in T'ang service, An Lu-shan, broke out in North China. After many years of civil war it was suppressed, the T'ang dynasty recovered the capital, and continued on the throne for another hundred and fifty years. But it was never again so powerful or so fully in control of the empire. To suppress the rebels a great army had to be raised, and the generals who commanded it became powerful military governors in the provinces they subdued. As time went on it was more and more difficult for the Court to control these governors, who later began to fight each other.

In A.D. 868 another great rebellion broke out, which devastated the country from end to end. In A.D. 881 the rebels captured Ch'angan, and the Court fled to the western province of Ssuchuan. For fifteen years after that the T'ang dynasty nominally ruled amid increasing anarchy. The rebels were conquered, the Court returned to Ch'angan, already half ruined, but the Emperor was now a puppet in the hands of whatever military commander was strong enough to hold the capital. All the governors fought for this prize, and when in A.D. 907 one who was a barbarian in Chinese service captured the city, he dethroned and exterminated the T'ang imperial family, utterly destroyed Ch'angan, and moved his capital eastward to his own headquarters at Loyang in Honan province.

This usurper only controlled a small part of the country; rival military commanders seized

upon the different provinces and all proclaimed themselves "emperors". China was divided among them into eight states, which were usually at war with each other. This troubled period, called in Chinese history "The Five Dynasties" (because five very short régimes succeeded each other in the northern part of China), only lasted for fifty-three years. The tradition of a unified empire was strong and lasting; no one expected partition to be the real solution; and when a new dynasty, the Sung, led by a man of great ability, came to power in the north, the reunion of the whole empire was quickly brought about, mainly without serious opposition.

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CHAPTER SIX

The Sung Dynasty

THE SUNG DYNASTY which reunited China after the turmoil of the Five Dynasties lasted in all for three hundred and twenty years, but this period is divided almost equally into the Northern Sung from A.D. 960 to 1127, after which they lost the north to a Tartar invasion, and held the south for another hundred and fifty-three years till A.D. 1280. When at last a capable ruler seized the throne in A.D. 960, the new Emperor of the Sung, Chao Kuang-yin by name, had very little difficulty in absorbing all the small states into which China had divided at the fall of the T'ang. Many of them surrendered without fighting; instead of putting their rulers to death the Sung Emperor gave them titles and made them into his own officials. This was a new mercy which had never been shown in former dynastic wars.

It is tempting to think that the Sung got their reward in an absence of rebellions against their rule. In fact, there were hardly any such rebellions, and none that were at all serious. The troubles of the new dynasty and empire

came from beyond its frontiers. The Sung dynasty, although, like every other, founded by a general, was not warlike. The tumults at the end of the T'ang had perhaps exhausted the Chinese people. In the Sung period they became almost pacifist, and did not try to make foreign conquests or even regain the full extent of the T'ang empire. To the north there were already two powerful neighbours. The Liao dynasty, ruling in Manchuria and a corner of North China, was founded by a Tartar people called the Kitans. Strangely enough, it is from the name of this foreign people that the term Cathay, a poetic name for China, comes. In later times the first European travellers picked up this as the name for North China, where the Kitans had ruled, and used it as the name of the whole country.

To the north-west along the road to Central Asia and in North-Western China itself there was a kingdom called Hsia. The rulers of this state were of Tibetan stock, their subjects both Chinese and Tartar. They invented a system of writing similar in some ways to the Chinese characters, but the key to it has been lost, and it cannot now be read. The Sung never subdued either the Liao or the Hsia; indeed they tended to get the worst of the border wars with these neighbours. It was the Liao who first made a city on the site of the present Peking one of their capitals. The Sung had moved away eastwards from the old centres at Ch'angan and Loyang,

and placed their Court at K'aifeng, now the capital of Honan province, near to the Yellow River.

But if the Sung were not warlike, they governed China very well. It was in this dynasty that the examinations for the Civil Service came into full use and wholly replaced the old system of recommendation. One important change had come about at the very end of the T'ang and developed during the Five Dynasties; the invention of printing. The first printed books appeared in late T'ang times, but a hundred years later the practice had become general, the Chinese classics were printed, the histories and other literature from the past also. Some Sung editions still exist and all later editions of early Chinese literature are reprints of Sung editions. One result of this was the spread of education to a much wider range of people; the Sung could recruit their officials from a large class of educated men, many of whom were neither very rich nor well connected.

Possibly because the old land route to western Asia and beyond was no longer in Chinese hands the Sung had much less interest in foreign countries and foreign fashions than the T'ang. They were conservative and nationalist. It was at this time that a great revival of Confucian learning swept through China, partly helped by the new cheap printed editions of the classics. This movement was also a reaction against foreign religions, especially Buddhism. In practice the

new Confucianism was a much more complicated and developed philosophy than the old doctrine of Han times. The Sung thinkers reconstructed Confucianism throughout; but they always claimed that they were making no new changes, merely bringing out the lost meaning of the ancient texts. In Sung China it would have been considered all wrong to tamper with the antique system and change it, even though that was what in fact was happening.

Most of the Sung Emperors were hard-working, serious-minded rulers, none very brilliant, but willing to accept the advice of their able ministers. Among these there were two parties, almost like the political parties of modern times, who were on the one side the Conservatives, on the other the Innovators, or Progressives. These latter were led by a statesman named Wang An-shih, who proposed a whole series of sweeping reforms, some of which have a very modern character. Such ideas as rural banks to advance money to farmers against the crops they would later harvest, military conscription, state granaries to keep the price of rice down in times of scarcity, and buy it up in times of plenty, were tried out by Wang.

It is impossible to know with any certainty how well these plans worked, because the party who wrote history were his opponents, and they have taken care to show him and his policy in an unfavourable light. Nevertheless Wang and his adherents were trusted by several emperors, and

remained in power for many years. His policy cannot have been the utter failure his enemies pretend, for no rebellions followed and the empire remained at peace. Unlike earlier times when fallen statesmen were usually imprisoned and often executed, in the Sung period they were treated much more humanely. The usual fate of the fallen minister was to be sent as a magistrate to govern some small district in a remote part of the empire. This happened both to Wang and also to his opponents when their turn came round.

The Sung have left a vast amount of literature; not only histories, books of philosophy, studies on all subjects, but even private letters and memoirs of famous men have survived, no doubt because the new printing made so many more copies than was possible when all books were written by hand and copied by hand. From this literature we know more about the lives of people in the Sung; but we have less archaeological remains. The custom of placing clay models in tombs still continued, but was beginning to decline. In the next age these models were no longer made, paper figures were substituted and burnt at the funeral. For this reason Sung tombs do not reveal so many details of the life of the time, and so far no Sung city which did not continue inhabited has been found. The great cities of the Sung period are all still centres of large population, and few of the Sung buildings, except some temples, now remain.

On the other hand there are a number of paintings from the Sung dynasty. It was the greatest age of Chinese paintings, much more refined and less romantic than the surviving T'ang paintings. Landscape was a great favourite with the Sung; it seems to have been at this time that the idea of the long scroll, perhaps six feet or more, depicting a whole countryside, came into fashion. One very famous scroll shows the Ch'ing Ming holiday at the capital. This is a spring festival, when everyone puts on new clothes and goes for a picnic in the countryside, often to the tombs of their ancestors. The picture from about A.D. 1100 shows the whole city with its crowded streets; through the open doors of houses one can see people sitting on chairs and couches at tables, or playing musical instruments, feasting and watching dancers. Along the river a crowd of gaily decorated boats winds past, and on the banks crowds are strolling through a fair, with others dining at outdoor restaurants. It is one of the first Chinese pictures to give a general view of how the people lived and amused themselves.

Another famous Sung picture called "Ten Thousand Miles of the Yangtze" traces the river from its mountainous upper reaches, down through the great gorges and rapids into the calmer waters of Central China, and on to the sea. Every sort of scenery is shown, with many details of the towns and villages, the boats and traffic of the great river. In these pictures the

costume of the age is shown clearly; not the trousers and coats of later China, but loose robes, which working men tucked up round their legs, and turbans which they wore on their heads. Peasants, then as now, also wore the wide straw hats which keep off both rain and sun. The last of the Northern Sung Emperors was a very famous artist, several of whose paintings still exist. He specialized on birds, which he painted with exquisite delicacy. He was a much better artist than emperor, and ended his days a captive of the Tartar invaders. But he also founded the first "national gallery" of pictures in history, and we still have its catalogue.

It is now known that porcelain was already made in T'ang times, but very few intact pieces have survived, and these are mostly small. In the Sung dynasty this art and industry came under the direct authority of the Court, kilns were started in various parts of the country, which produced the now rare famous Sung single-colour wares. The purple, white (*blanc de Chine*), and black and white porcelain of the early Sung is in China the most treasured and admired of all their wares. In Europe and the West it was very little known until about twenty-five years ago, when some of the pieces which had been in the imperial palace collection found their way on to the market. Throughout the Sung dynasty, both North and South, the porcelain art expanded, new centres were opened up including the famous Chingtechen, ever since that age the

main manufacturing centre in China. It was named after the reign title of the third Sung Emperor, a date corresponding to the years A.D. 1004 to A.D. 1008.

Great advances in the technical side of potting were made in the Sung period. The sites of the kilns, some but not all of which are now abandoned, have yielded great quantities of what are called "wasters"—imperfect vessels which were thrown out as unfit for use. Many have only small defects, a little out of shape, or the glaze has overspilled the base. These together with great quantities of sherds (broken pieces) form a mass of material which experts can study to determine the methods used in firing the kilns and mixing the glazes, colours and texture of the clay.

In the Sung period Buddhism began to decline. There was no sudden falling away, but the religion gradually became less alive and made no further progress either in converting the whole Chinese people or in its contest with Taoism. Buddhist temples continue to flourish, as indeed they have in some parts of China up till the present time; several temples dating from the Sung dynasty still stand, and there are also from this period many very beautiful statues of the Buddha carved in wood. Wood-carving from earlier periods has rarely survived, but Sung Buddhas, usually modelled in a graceful, rather languid posture, are some of the finest sculpture in China.

At this time the Buddhist saint, or demigod, known to the Chinese as Kuan Yin (Japanese



Porcelain statuette of Kuan Yin represented
as a mother with a child

Kwannon) is portrayed as a beautiful woman, a Mother Goddess. It is certain that in earlier Buddhism Kuan Yin was either male or a sexless divine being. Buddhism did not in fact provide any goddess, and the Chinese people must

have felt the lack of a divine mother. Gradually Kuan Yin became more female until from Sung times onwards she is the beautiful merciful goddess who intercedes for suffering mankind and presides over the family ("Kuan Yin the Giver of Sofis"). The name, a translation from the Indian Sanskrit title, means "He (or She) Who Hears"; hears the cry of the suffering world and refused to enter paradise until all mankind is redeemed and able to enter with her.

The Sung dynasty did not control the old land route to western Asia across Turkestan, as the Han and T'ang had done. That region was now in the hands of Moslem kingdoms, who were not only at war with each other, but hostile to "infidels". The land route fell more and more into disuse, and the sea route to the West became important. Sea traffic to China from the ports of the Persian Gulf and Red Sea was in the hands of the Arabs, who came to China in large numbers. One of the Chinese officials who was a kind of inspector of the Customs service, wrote a book on the foreign lands from which these merchants came, based entirely on the information that he got from them. It does not appear to be the case that Chinese in the Sung period visited any of these countries. In addition to more knowledge of Syria and Iraq, then the home provinces of the Abbasid Caliphs who reigned in Bagdad, the Chinese learned, or at least for the first time recorded, facts about Africa. Egypt is quite well described, and the

river Nile "whose source is not known" was particularly interesting to the Chinese. They were accustomed to a climate in which there is a heavy summer rainfall, on which the crops depend. To hear about a country where it hardly ever rains, but where a river mysteriously rises every year and irrigates the fields, seemed miraculous to the Chinese.

The book also mentions Zanzibar, where Sung porcelain has been found, as an island in the sea which has to the west a great mountain, possibly Kilimanjaro or even Mount Kenya. Zebras and giraffes are described, and so is the island of Madagascar, "inhabited by many savages with bodies as black as lacquer" whom the Arabs caught and carried off as slaves. This must be one of the first mentions of the terrible African slave trade which afflicted that continent for another eight hundred years. Several of the countries round the Mediterranean are named, such as Morocco, Spain and Sicily, all of which were then subject to Moslem rulers, in whole or part. Beyond Spain, the book says, "if one travels by land for two hundred days the days are only six hours long". Two hundred days at roughly twenty miles a day, the speed of a mule caravan, would bring you nearly four thousand miles or so (allowing for stops) and, in fact, no part of northern Europe is so far from Spain. But this story clearly does refer to north-western Europe, where the winter days are very short. Whether Arab merchants really travelled in

caravan up to the Baltic sea coast in the early eleventh century is not known; it may be that they were passing on information which they had heard from Western merchants who travelled to Spain or southern France, where there had been Arab settlements.

Sicily is treated in some detail. The size of the island is given with fair accuracy; it was close to the Byzantine Empire (to which it had recently belonged) and the customs and language of the people were the same as those of "Lu Mei" (that is, "Rum" the Arab name for Rome, and so for the eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire). It is a fact that at this time the Sicilians still spoke Greek. The volcano Mount Etna is mentioned, but it is clear that the Chinese author did not quite understand what his Arab friend was trying to tell him. He mentions that the mountain "in which is a cavern with a great roaring fire" threw up pumice stone, but he understood that eruptions occurred regularly once every five years, that the lava ("fire and stones") flowed down to the sea (which it has done in the past) and that it did not burn the trees in the woods through which it passed, but turned the rocks to ashes. There are no active volcanoes in China, so he had no experience of their behaviour. Presumably the Chinese of his time did not have any knowledge of the active volcanoes in Japan.

In the year 1080 the Byzantine Empire, evidently learning that China was once more

strong, and being itself in grave danger from the Turkish invasion of Asia Minor, sent an embassy to China to try and get the Sung Emperor to attack the Turks from the rear. The distances were in fact impossibly great, the Sung were not even in control of the road through Sinkiang to Central Asia, and they could have done nothing against the Turks still farther west. However, the Sung history records the name of the Eastern Roman Emperor, Nicephorus, and that of his ambassador, which has not been identified with any certainty.

Throughout the first half of the Sung dynasty the power of the Tartar peoples of the Mongolian steppe had been growing. They had already invaded China in the Five Dynasties, and the Sung had not been able to drive them out of the north-eastern corner of the country, the present province of Hopei, including the city now named Peking. There was an uneasy truce for several years, the Sung buying off the hostility of the Tartar Liao dynasty with large sums of money, which they called "gifts", but the Liao named "tribute". But in A.D. 1119 the Liao themselves were overthrown by a fiercer people from Mongolia called the Kin. Almost at once this new power attacked the Sung, and in A.D. 1126 inflicted on the Chinese a great defeat. The artist Sung Emperor, who painted birds so well, was taken prisoner when his capital K'aifeng fell, and he ended his days a prisoner in the steppes. Other members of the imperial

family fled south, beyond the Yangtze, and after a long struggle managed to hold South China. Just as eight hundred years before the Tartars found the south of China bad country for cavalry operations, so their successors the Kin, who actually crossed the lower Yangtze, were defeated in this unfamiliar terrain, and retired to the drier north. Once more the empire was divided, with a Chinese dynasty ruling the south, a Tartar Emperor in the north.

The Sung set up their new capital at Hangchou, a famous and beautiful city, near the sea in Chekiang province. Hangchou is built on the shores of a shallow lake, surrounded by low mountains. The lake is divided and crossed by long causeways, leading to islands. This scenery is generally believed to be the origin of the islands and lake shown in the familiar "willow pattern" which we find so often on modern Western china. It is a fact that one of the island groups, with its little pagodas and temples, is very much like the picture on the "willow pattern". In these new surroundings the rather unwarlike Sung settled down and continued to develop their great arts of painting and porcelain. They claimed to be planning to recover North China, they would not call Hangchou the capital, but only the "Temporary Capital", but they were not strong enough to drive out the Kin. For more than a century they lived in relative peace, and Hangchou became the great wealthy and marvellous city which Marco Polo, the Venetian

(Right) Porcelain vase, Ming
Dynasty. Chia Ching reign, A.D.
1522-1566 (Nanking Museum)



(Below, left) Kuan Yin. Blanc de
Chine porcelain, Ming Dynasty,
A.D. 1368-1566 (Nanking
Museum)

(Below, right) Wood carving,
Kuan Yin, Sung Dynasty, A.D.
960-1278 (Peking Palace
Museum)



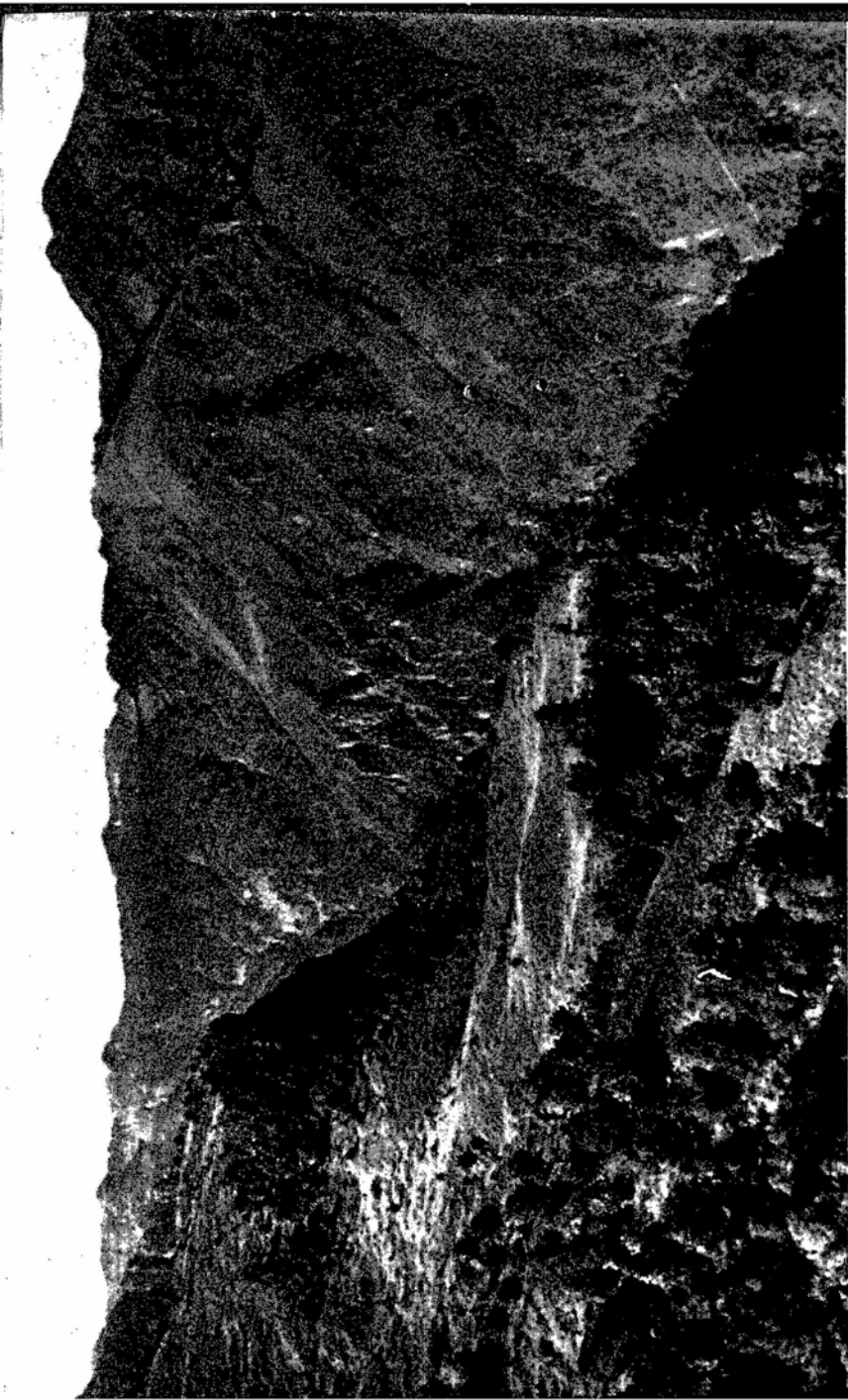


(Above, left) Carved lacquer vase. (Above, right) Carved lacquer throne.

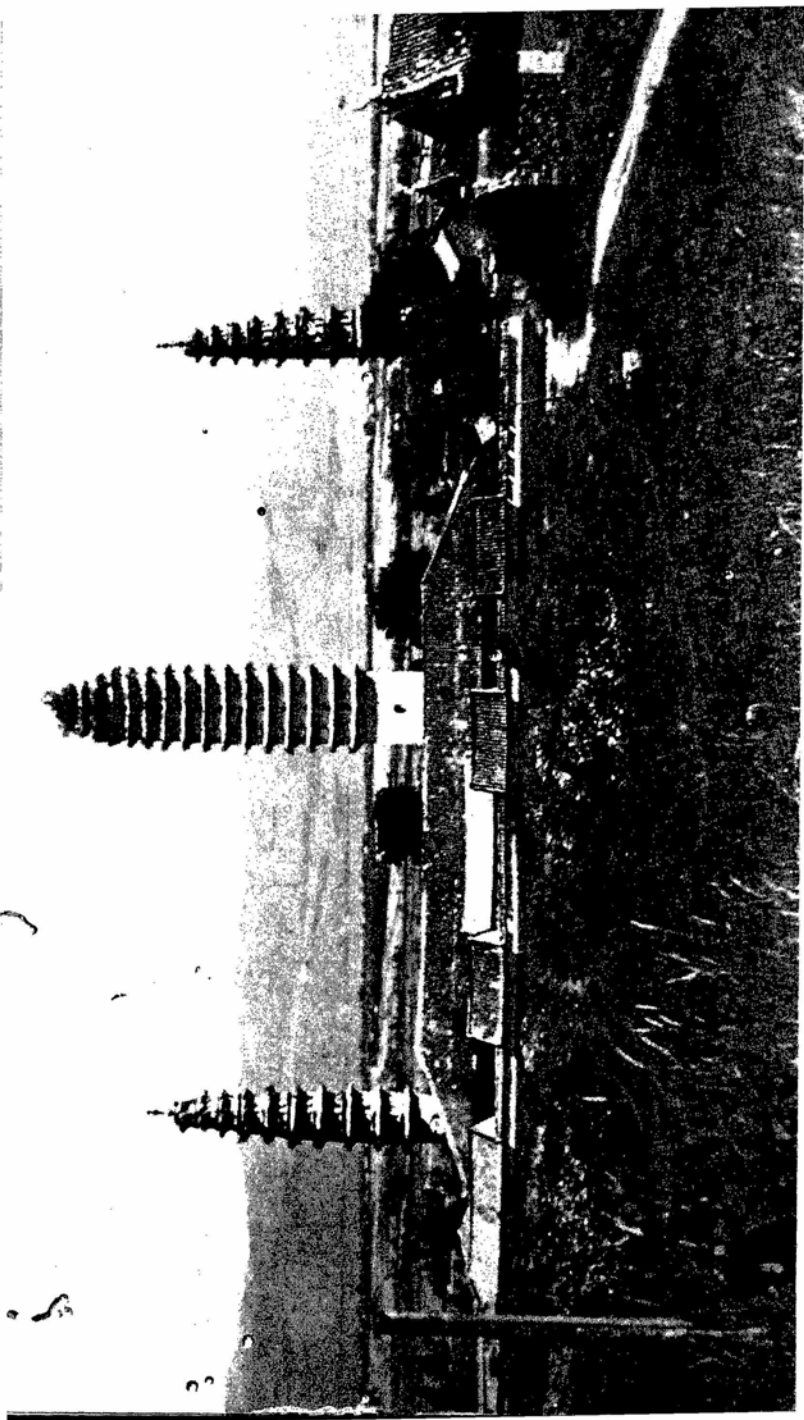
(Below, left) Silk screen. (Below, right) Jade, ivory and wood screen.

All Ch'ing (Manchu) Dynasty, A.D. 1644–1911 (Nanking Museum)





n, South West China (author's photograph)



Three Pagoda Monastery, Tali, Yunnan. T'ang period (author's photograph)

traveller in the next century, described with wonder under the name of "Quinsay". Marco Polo never learned Chinese, and his place names are always wrong, taken from some colloquial term. In this case it was probably "Ching Sui", meaning "Headquarters". By this time the Sung dynasty had fallen and Hangchou was no longer the capital.

In 1234 the Kin were attacked and conquered by even more terrible foes, the famous Mongols led by Genghiz Khan. Within a few years of conquering North China he attacked the Sung, but strangely enough this world conqueror found more difficulty in the south than anywhere else, probably because his troops were all cavalry. It took the Mongols nearly fifty years to complete the conquest of the southern Sung Empire, which was defended better by mountains and rivers than by military skill. In the end the last Sung Emperor—a young boy—and his guardians and Court took to the sea. They hung out for a few years in the many islands along the south coast of China, until the Mongols created a fleet, manned by northern Chinese who had long been their subjects. In a final sea battle somewhere near the present city of Hong Kong the Sung were utterly defeated; the Prime Minister and guardian of the young Emperor took him in his arms and leapt into the sea. All parts of China, and many other countries far beyond her borders, were now subdued by the Mongol conquerors.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Tartars and Mongols

FROM THE BEGINNING of the Sung dynasty the Chinese had never controlled the north-east corner of their country, or the region later called Manchuria, beyond the Great Wall. In this region a Tartar dynasty called the Liao had gained control, making a city on the site of Peking its southern capital. This was the first time, in A.D. 907, that Peking became a capital of any large part of China. For more than a thousand years thereafter it never ceased to be the capital, more often of the whole country.

The Liao were overthrown in A.D. 1119 by the Kin, another Tartar people, who not only conquered the Liao but then invaded Sung China and seized upon the northern half of the country. They also made their main capital at Peking, and remodelled the city. In A.D. 1234 the Kin were conquered by the Mongols under Genghez Khan, who destroyed the Kin city of Peking, but then rebuilt a new capital on the same site, much larger than the old. The later city of Peking occupies practically the same site as the Mongol

foundation; the east and west walls are on the same line, but the northern and southern walls were moved about half a mile southwards. It can be said that Peking today is substantially the same city as that which Genghiz built in 1235 and following years, although few buildings of his date survive, and the city was greatly altered by the Ming in A.D. 1410. It was therefore the foreign Tartar dynasties who first made this northern site the capital of China. The later dynasties both Chinese and alien kept their capital there, and today Peking is still the capital of China.

This was an important change; in Han and T'ang times the site of Peking was the northern frontier military headquarters, but it would have seemed to the Chinese of those ages a strange place to put the capital. The reasons for the choice were no doubt the fact that Liao, Kin and Mongols were all Tartars from beyond the Wall and that Peking is on a site which commands the main passes through the mountains on which the Wall is built. Whoever holds Peking can open and shut the northern gates of China. Whether the power beyond the Wall was hostile, as the Manchus were to the Chinese Ming, or whether the country beyond the Wall was the homeland of the dynasty, as with Mongols and Manchus, it was essential to hold this city and concentrate the army and the central government at this point. That is why for a thousand years Peking has been the capital of China. Now that the main industrial area of modern China

lies in Inner Mongolia and Manchuria, the old country beyond the Wall, Peking is more than ever a strategic point for controlling the whole of China.

The Kin conquerors of northern China were not a barbarous people; indeed they seem to have already acquired a high degree of civilization, and they used Chinese officials and experts freely. At the siege of K'aifeng, the Sung capital, in A.D. 1126, artillery fired with gunpowder was used for the first recorded time in history. It seems clear that gunpowder had been invented in China many years before, but had only been used in firecrackers, not as a destructive explosive and propellant. The Kin artillerymen, or whoever devised the primitive cannon they used, were the first to use gunpowder in war.

It has already been mentioned that printing was invented in China under the T'ang dynasty in the ninth century. It greatly developed in the next age both in Sung and in Kin China. Paper had been invented many years before this, but the invention of printing made it far more useful and important. Books which have to be printed cannot be written on parchment or papyrus grass, wooden boards or bamboo slips. Such materials do not bend easily, or are too rare and expensive for widespread use. So paper and print go together, and without these twin inventions no great expansion of books and publishing can happen. The Chinese also invented the compass. Just when is not easy to

say, for here too they used it for many centuries only to place buildings foursquare with the back to the north, and the front facing south; or to set their tombs in the position recommended by the soothsayers, who were expert in the art which in China was called "Feng Shui", meaning "wind and water", the belief in lucky and unlucky situations, sites, positions and influences coming from the landscape.

The Arabs took the Chinese invention of the compass and made use of it for navigation; later the Chinese did the same. Thus the four great inventions which have made modern organization possible, and thus the whole development of modern science and technology, originated in China. Without paper you cannot print, without the compass you cannot navigate the great oceans, without gunpowder, and later explosives, the building of roads and communications in difficult country is hardly possible. Yet the Chinese only made a great use of the first of these two inventions; the development of the others was left to the West.

The reasons why the Chinese, who invented many ingenious things which are the origins of many technical and mechanical developments of modern times, did not themselves make this development are rather obscure, and whole books are being written upon this subject, which the modern Chinese find very interesting. The main reason, all agree, is that in China the officials who ruled the country were chosen by the Civil

Service examination, a very stiff one, for which years of preparation in literature and history were essential. These subjects must be learned; mathematics, science and technology were treated as minor matters, the hobbies of inquisitive men, or the routine skills of craftsmen and workmen, not fit subjects for a gentleman to meddle with. The other reason, also important, is that China had no great trade with foreign countries, therefore no great trading ports in which many merchants interested in improving navigation and manufacturing skills lived. The Pacific Ocean was too wide, for many centuries China's near neighbours were barbarous or more backward than China, western Asia was too far for anything but a trade in a few luxuries like silk and porcelain. In these few commodities, where trade did stimulate invention, the Chinese became the finest weavers of embroidery and the most skilled potters in the world. In other things there was no encouragement and so very little progress.

As the Kin Tartars were not very numerous in relation to the Chinese population over whom they ruled, and very willing to be regarded as a Chinese dynasty, they quickly learned the Chinese language, lost their own, and became as keen students of the Chinese classics and the new movement in Confucian philosophy as the Chinese under the Sung in the south. When one of the greatest of these philosophers fell out of favour with the Sung Emperor, the Kin Emperor asked the Sung ambassador at his Court, "And

where is the Great Chu Hsi now?" The Sung, very much afraid that the Kin would shame them by inviting Chu Hsi to their Court, hastily gave him a promotion.

The truth was that both empires were soon to be threatened by a much more formidable enemy than either of them was likely to be to each other. The Kin ruled in North China just over a century before the Mongol conquerors under Genghiz Khan burst upon them. They appealed in their great danger to the Sung, saying, "We are the lips and you are the teeth, if the lips are gone the teeth will feel the cold." But the Sung did nothing to help. Indeed, when the Mongols were besieging the Kin capital, the Sung sent an expedition north, not to help them but to try to recover North China for themselves.

This was a disastrous thing to do, for it brought the storm of the Mongol conquest down on the Sung; the Mongols swept them back over the Yangtze, and began the conquest of South China, using the same ferocity that they had inflicted on the Kin. Every city which shot off so much as one arrow against the Mongols when they attacked it was utterly destroyed and all the people in it put to the sword. The only way to escape these massacres was immediate unconditional surrender. This was the Mongol rule of war. They had already utterly destroyed the north-western kingdom of Hsia, which lay in the region of North-West China and western Inner Mongolia. They treated this country with

such violence that it has never truly recovered. Cities were left ruined, the country people slain, and the fields were covered with drifting sand till much of it has become a desert.

The same ruthless savagery was used against the Chinese cities of the north and south. Changchou, a very large city not far from Nanking, was totally wiped out. When the Mongols captured K'aifeng, the old capital of the Sung, then the southern capital of the Kin, which had been defended with desperation, they proposed to apply their rule of war and slaughter all the inhabitants, who numbered more than a million. They were for once persuaded to spare them, because, as one of their advisers pointed out, all the skilled craftsmen, the makers of weapons and armour, and other useful arts had fled to K'aifeng for refuge. If they were slain the Mongols would lose thousands of useful experts whom they could not replace. This argument won the day, and K'aifeng was spared.

By this time the Mongols had conquered a large part of China, Central Asia, part of India and all of Persia. In some of these countries they had applied their terrible rule of war, and marks of it are borne to this day. But they were beginning to find it difficult to administer this vast ever-growing empire, which was useless to them unless people were left alive to pay taxes and tribute. A rule which had struck terror into their early enemies in Mongolia and along the borders was less useful to them when they began

to seize large areas of civilized countries, crowded with a farming population. In Mongolia, if you slaughtered your foes there was more grazing land left for your own beasts. In China waste agricultural land was useless, ruined cities did not pay taxes. Slowly the Mongols began to understand this, and they were helped to do so by the wise counsels of a very remarkable man.

Yeh-lu Ch'u-ts'ai was a descendant of the royal house of the Liao dynasty. After that dynasty fell his family took service with the new Kin dynasty, and his forefathers had held high rank at the Kin Court. They were now, although of Tartar origin, Chinese in education and outlook. Yeh-lu, when some Mongol general suggested that it would be best to massacre the entire Chinese people so that the country could revert to grass for grazing, made Genghiz understand that this was a mistake. Left to till the soil, pay taxes, and provide from their skills the luxuries that the Mongols were beginning to enjoy, the Chinese could be useful subjects. It is interesting that Yeh-lu knew his master too well to use any arguments drawn from common humanity.

The successors of Genghiz finished the conquest of China, and also of many other countries in western Asia and eastern Europe. So vast an empire could hardly hold together in an age without faster communications than couriers mounted on good horses. In A.D. 1280 when Kublai Khan came to the Chinese throne he

yielded the government of the western Asian countries to other members of the imperial family. His reign was peaceful in China, where none dared to oppose it, but his invasion of Japan was a disastrous failure, and his expeditions to Burma and Annam did not succeed, more from the effects of the hot climate on his troops than the resistance of the enemy.

Kublai governed China not through the Chinese officials recruited by examination who had served the Kin just as well as they served the Chinese Sung. The Mongols enlisted as officials men from all parts of their empire and beyond. There were Arabs, Persians, Central Asians, and also Europeans, the most famous of whom is Marco Polo, who served the Great Khan for many years. He finally returned to Venice by the sea route after escorting one of the Emperor's daughters to Persia, where she was to marry a Mongol king. The tales he told of the power and wealth of China, the size of the cities, the vast population (probably then about a hundred million) were not believed in Europe, and they nicknamed him "The Million" in Venice because he told such stories. Yet they were true. Even after the Mongol invasion and devastation, China in the peaceful reign of Kublai had recovered much of the wealth and civilization of the Sung.

The legend, as it seemed, of the fabulous wealth of China lived on in Europe for centuries. It inspired the early explorers who sailed across

the Atlantic, not knowing that America lay before them, but hoping to land on the east coast of China. There are still place names in America, such as the La Chine rapids on the St. Lawrence in Canada, which were so named because the first explorers hoped that not far beyond them they would come to China. Kublai Khan became the only Emperor of China whose name every European had heard. To the Chinese ~~themselves~~, all this seemed rather different. They had now to share the official posts with many strangers, who did not even speak Chinese (like Marco Polo), could not read a word of the classics, and were to the Chinese no more than barbarians. The examination system was abolished. Chinese learning was now of little interest to the emperors, and few scholars were employed at Court.

The Chinese still studied their ancient classics and history, but many began to employ their learning in a new way, to entertain the people. The Chinese drama began in this alien dynasty to flourish, and to this time date most of the oldest and many of the best plays still performed in the Chinese theatre. They deal always with Chinese history, legend or life, never with foreign subjects. If, as some people once thought, the drama came to China from the many foreigners then in the country, one would expect that the early plays would show the foreign influence. They do not, and it is now known that the Chinese drama really developed from early beginnings at the T'ang Court. It was the

unemployed scholars of the Mongol period who turned to writing plays as a pastime.

Kublai Khan died in A.D. 1295. He had no worthy or even competent successor. In less than eighty years after his death the Mongol dynasty was driven from the throne by a great Chinese uprising. This Mongol dynasty left very little in China to mark its rule. Some few of the ~~buildings~~ buildings in Peking, a small part of the Palace and the Bell Tower, remain from Kublai's capital. A number of inscriptions on great tablets of stone provide a curious glimpse of the country under the foreign rulers. These inscriptions are written in Chinese characters, but in very bad Chinese. Some of them are almost meaningless, apparently using Chinese characters to write Mongol sounds. In so far as they can be read, they seem to be imperial decrees ordering the protection of Buddhist monasteries from Mongol soldiery. It is a clear proof of the foreign character of the Mongol dynasty and its officials that massive official monuments could be set up with inscriptions which must have made every educated Chinese scornful and contemptuous of his rulers' ignorance.

The later rulers of the Mongol dynasty (which the Chinese call the Yüan dynasty) were ardent Buddhists. As their cousins in western Asia had become Moslems, this fact divided the Mongol Empire more completely than the partition among the Mongol princes. In the early days of the Mongol Empire the Khans were pagans, and

every great religion in Asia and also the Pope in Rome hoped to convert these terrible warriors to their own faith, and get them on their side. Missionaries from Rome preached before Genghiz, as did Moslems, Buddhists and Taoists. In the Chinese Empire the Buddhists won this contest, in western Asia the Moslems; some few Mongol princes were for a time attracted to Christianity, but, as few of their subjects were Christians they all ended by adopting the chief religion of the countries over which they ruled. The successors of Kublai Khan favoured the Lama Buddhists of Tibet, a sect alien in China at that time. The Lamas became so powerful at the Mongol Court that they oppressed the people, interfered with the government and made themselves very unpopular. To the Chinese they were just another group of foreigners who exploited the empire under the Mongol Emperors.

A dynasty which showed so little understanding of the character of the Chinese and the safe way to govern so vast a country was not likely to last long. It did not; after only eighty-eight years the Mongols were driven from China, the shortest reign of any of the great unifying dynasties.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Later Empire

IN THE MIDDLE of the fourteenth century, around the years A.D. 1350 to 1356, a great revolt of the subject Chinese broke out against the incompetent and oppressive rule of the Mongol dynasty. There was at first no one leader of the Chinese, but several, and they fought each other as well as the Mongols. But in 1356 one of the rebels captured the southern capital, Nanking, and there proclaimed himself Emperor. His rivals made no such wise use of their power, preferring to sack cities and sweep the country in search of loot.

Chu Yüan-chang, who thus founded the great Ming dynasty, and a few years later drove the Mongols out of China, had an extraordinary career. He was the son of poor peasants, famine refugees, who sold him as a boy to a temple where he became a Buddhist monk. This life did not suit him at all. He left the temple and became a bandit, then joined a band of rebels, and later became their chief. From then on, skilfully seizing places of importance and gradually building up his power in the lower

Yangtze provinces, the richest in the empire, he rose to be the first Emperor of the Ming dynasty. Earlier founders of dynasties had been men of rank, holding titles such as Duke of T'ang (a region in the north) or Prince of Sung, and from these they took the name of the dynasty. But Chu had neither rank nor title, so he chose the name "Ming", meaning "Brilliant", for his dynasty—and brilliant at first it certainly was. Twelve years after taking Nanking his general Hsu Ta advanced on Peking with nearly a quarter of a million men. The Mongol Emperor did not wait for a siege, but abandoned his capital and empire and fled into the Mongolian steppe. He was relentlessly pursued; four years later Hsu Ta burned Genghiz Khan's old capital Karakorum in Outer Mongolia, and then crossed the mountains into what is now Siberia. This is the farthest north that any Chinese army has ever penetrated.

The capital was at first fixed at Nanking; Peking was made the second, Northern Capital, for Peking means that, just as Nanking means Southern Capital. The first Ming Emperor then reorganized his new empire, sweeping away all the Mongol foreign ways, restoring the examination system, and making it his aim, as is written on his tomb, "to rule like the T'ang and Sung". It was a great Chinese reaction, a determined effort to revive the glories of these past dynasties. The Ming empire was certainly more populous, and held larger territories than the older

dynasties. South Manchuria was made a regular province. Formosa was colonized. Yunnan, in the far south-west, was incorporated in the empire; in Sinkiang, which had lost its importance as the trade route to the west since the Mongol devastations, the Ming were content to hold only the eastern oases, the keys to this old road. The Ming also divided China into its present provinces, some of which are as old as the T'ang, but in the south the Ming subdivided the huge areas of T'ang times.

After reigning for thirty² years over all China, the first Ming Emperor died, leaving his throne to his grandson, a boy of sixteen. His powerful uncle, the viceroy of the North, second son of the first Ming, soon coveted the throne, rebelled, and took Nanking. In the confusion the young Emperor disappeared. For years he was thought to be dead, but doubt remained, as his body was never found. Many years later, in A.D. 1441 when he was an old man, he was recognized disguised as a Buddhist monk. By then his uncle had long been dead. The reigning Emperor, his grandson, caused the aged monk to be taken to a temple where, under guard, he passed the few remaining years of his strange life. Yung Lo, "the wicked uncle" of this story, moved the capital to Peking, which he rebuilt, as the older part of the city within the walls stands today. He also built the present Imperial Palace, the "Forbidden City" as it is often called; a million labourers are said to have been employed on these works, and

given ten years to do the work. They finished it in five.

Yung Lo was a great patron of literature as well as a famous soldier. He also sent out the first great overseas naval expeditions in Chinese history. Seven such expeditions were sent in the years between 1410 and 1435. Hundreds of specially built ships very much larger than modern "junks" were used, and an army of seventy thousand men embarked. They sailed all over the southern seas, across the Indian Ocean to Africa, up the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea, to India and Ceylon, the Indonesian islands and as far south as Timor, a name which they recorded. Whether some ships may have gone farther and found the forbidding coast of northern Australia is uncertain. There is a scrap of evidence, a Chinese statue of unknown date found deeply buried at Darwin, which might have been left by such a ship.

One of these expeditions reached the coast of East Africa and brought back a live giraffe for the Emperor. Such an animal had never been seen in China before. Court flatterers told the Emperor that this must be the mythical Chi Lin, a beast which only appears on earth when a sage is on the throne. The Emperor, well aware that his character was not that of a sage, told them not to be foolish.

The overseas expeditions of the Ming are puzzling. They did not seek to conquer countries, although so strong, nor to found colonies abroad.

They did make the kings of the southern seas pay nominal tribute to China and contribute presents for the Court (such as the giraffe). They did some trade, but only in such strange luxuries as these, and trade was not the motive. It seems that the reason was to show the pride and power of the Ming to far-off lands, which had heard of the terrible Mongols. Now they could see the Chinese who had defeated the Mongols. It also seems as if the leader of these expeditions, a Chinese called Cheng Ho, was really more interested in discovery and exploration, and persuaded the Court to pay for these great expeditions because he wanted to explore the world. After his death there were no more, and in later times the Court never sent out others.

The Ming were sailing their fleets all over the Indian Ocean only fifty years or so before Vasco da Gama, the Portuguese navigator, rounded the Cape of Good Hope and sailed across to India. If he and his successors had found the Chinese established at naval bases on the shores of the Indian Ocean, the whole history of the Europeans in Asia would have been very different. But the Ming, who had this sea empire for the taking, were not interested, and let it slip. The Chinese of later times were to pay dearly for neglecting to keep up the sea power which they so suddenly developed in the early Ming period.

The Ming is the great age of architecture in China, partly, perhaps, because we have few older buildings still standing, but there is reason

to think that the Ming palaces were more splendid than any before. In Peking today one may wander through the vast halls and courtyards of Yung Lo's palace, used by all his successors and by the Manchus after the Ming. Today it is the national museum. The perfect proportion and taste of the decoration of these buildings remain to show that the Ming were marvellous builders. In this age we no longer need archæology to show us how the Ming Chinese lived. Many of the old houses in Peking and some in Nanking are known to have been built in the Ming period, and very little altered if at all; the residence of Hsu Ta, the great general, still stands in Nanking.

Very recently, in 1958, archæology has revealed something which was unknown; that is, how an emperor was buried, and what went into those vast imperial tombs to accompany him in death. The tomb of the Ming Emperor Wan Li is one of the thirteen Ming imperial tombs in the neighbourhood of Peking. Wan Li, who reigned from A.D. 1573 to 1630, was one of the later Ming Emperors, indeed the last to reign in comparative peace before the troubles which foreshadowed the fall of the dynasty. His tomb is built in the same way as all others, a huge artificial hill covered with trees and surrounded by a high fortified wall, like that of a city, which is built right up to the sides of the mound. There is the usual temple in front of the tomb, where sacrifices to the Emperor's spirit were performed,

and an imposing stone gate seems to lead into the mound itself. But this is a sham. There is nothing behind it but solid earth.

The real entrance was very well concealed; far away in some other part of the great mound a vertical shaft was discovered which led down to a maze of twisting passages. At the end of these were two large vaulted halls, far beneath the earth's surface; the first was a hall of sacrifice furnished with incense burners in the form of giant blue-and-white porcelain bowls; there are three altars of marble with candlesticks, vases and vessels for sacrifices, all of the finest Ming porcelain. Beyond this was the tomb hall itself, where, on a raised dais at the end, stood the three great lacquered coffins of the Emperor and his two Empresses. Nothing had been disturbed; for the first time the archæologists had found an unrobbed imperial tomb. On the dais round the coffins were heaped up incredible treasures, of such value that it is hard even to put the possible price into money terms. The golden vessels, bowls, cups, vases and ingots weigh nearly a quarter of a ton. Huge lumps of polished jade, of very fine quality, were used to weigh down the corners of the priceless silks with which the coffins had been covered.

The silks are very much decayed, but where the folds have preserved pieces better, it is possible to see that they were of a quality of workmanship and embroidery which is hardly to be found in existence now. Great quantities of jade cups

and bowls, all of the purest white, with golden lids and stands, or of the finest green shades, stood round the coffins. Porcelain of the imperial mark representing every type made in what was one of the great periods for porcelain was ranged round the dais, chests of lacquer containing gold and silver, ingots were piled up at the sides. Inside the coffins the bones of the Emperor and his wives were dressed in gorgeous robes of embroidery with golden and silver thread, strung through with gems. On the Emperor's head was a kind of helmet of spun gold thread, incredibly delicately woven, backed with a coiled dragon whose head, all of the same fine workmanship, rested over the forehead of the Emperor, while its spread wings fanned out behind his head. All these treasures are now shown in the Palace Museum at Peking.

It was in this fabulous style that the Emperors of China were buried, surrounded with treasure worth millions, and works of art of incomparable beauty. In front of the coffins, at the foot of the dais, was a great mass of rotten timber, the remains of the logs on which the heavy coffins had been rolled into place, before they were almost buried in priceless silks and jades. The workmen, thinking that no one else would enter that sacred place, did not take the trouble to clear away their mess, but left Wan Li with all the riches and art of China at his head, and a lot of dirty logs at his feet.

There are twelve other Ming tombs at Peking,

and as far as can be known now none of them was ever robbed. It is probable that gradually they too will be opened and excavated. The work is expensive and the difficulty of finding the secret passage very great. These Ming tombs are the only imperial tombs which have not been robbed. Even the later Manchu tombs were robbed by mutinous soldiers as late as 1928, and their wonderful contents scattered or melted down. Very little of the gold ware such as was found in Wan Li's tomb was known before this discovery. It would seem probable that it was obviously too fine and rare to be safely sold on the curio market—people would have known it must come from an imperial tomb—so such things were melted down for their weight of gold.

It was in the reign of Wan Li that European navigators, at first all Portuguese, began to come to the coast of China in growing numbers. The first had arrived as early as A.D. 1516, but regular trade and contact was not established until the middle of the century. Although the Ming were wary of the Portuguese, who were just as ready to turn pirate as to act as merchants, the trade grew quickly, for both sides had something to sell which the other wanted. The Portuguese bought silk, porcelain and tea, the Chinese were interested in Portuguese muskets, clocks from Europe, and the products of the Indies which the Portuguese picked up on their way to China. It was not till the beginning of the

seventeenth century that the first missionaries landed in China.

These, such as Mateo Ricci, were scholars, who learned Chinese, both written and spoken, studied the Confucian classics, and in turn taught the Chinese some higher mathematics and enabled them to correct the errors in their calendar. It was for these services that the Chinese valued them and allowed them to stay in the country. Christianity made some converts from the first, many of them among the scholars who were in touch with the missionaries. When the Ming dynasty, a few years later, was struggling against the Manchu invasion, many Chinese at Court hoped for aid from the Portuguese and their improved firearms. The Empress of the refugee Court, then in South-West China, became a Christian, as did her sons, one of whom was baptized Constantine, in memory of the first Christian Emperor of Rome. But the Chinese Constantine never lived to reign; he and his family were betrayed to the Manchus and put to death.

By the time the Manchus entered China, in 1644, and set up their capital in Peking, which they took without fighting, they were no longer barbarians. It was already twenty-six years since the founder of the dynasty had set up a kingdom in the north-east in the land which foreigners afterwards called "Manchuria". Two Manchu rulers, who took the title of Emperor, had reigned in this region beyond the Wall, expand-

ing their state till it came down to the Wall itself, and in the process making many Chinese their subjects. From these they learned Chinese



Pavilion in the palace gardens, Peking

culture and imitated the manners of the Ming Court. They organized the whole nation into a military system called the Eight Banners, each of which was of a different colour or pattern. Two Banners were for those Chinese inhabitants of

Manchuria who had become Manchu subjects, or who fled to the Manchus from the increasing troubles of the Ming Empire. The Bannermen could only serve as soldiers or officials: they were not allowed to be merchants or farmers.

In the last years of the Ming a rebel leading a huge army of famine-stricken peasants and bandits ranged through North-West China, defeated the imperial generals, and then captured Peking itself. The Ming Emperor took his own life when all hope was gone; the small pavilion where he strangled himself, on the hill behind the palace, still stands. The Manchus, waiting their chance beyond the Great Wall, seized the opportunity. Invited to enter the country by the Chinese frontier commander, who would rather have them than the rebels, they quickly drove the latter out of Peking and proclaimed their own dynasty.

Nevertheless, it took them the best part of forty years before all China, right down to the Burma border, was pacified and subdued. The Ming at first fought back from the south; later, when they were crushed, Chinese generals who had joined the Manchus rebelled against them. One held Formosa (just as Chiang Kai-shek holds it now) and with his son reigned there for over twenty years. In the end the Manchus won the war. They were led to victory by the Emperor K'ang Hsi, a boy of sixteen when he came to the throne, but who occupied it with great glory for sixty years. The fortune of the Manchu dynasty

was that they had three capable and long-lived Emperors in the first two centuries of their reign; K'ang Hsi, 1662-1723, Yung Cheng 1723-1736, and Ch'ien Lung, who like his grandfather reigned for sixty years, A.D. 1736-1796.

It is little more than one hundred and fifty years since the death of Ch'ien Lung, the point which marks the decline of the Manchu dynasty. In its last century, the nineteenth, that decline was swift and calamitous. Wars with the Europeans, rebellions inside the country, were due in part, at least, to the conservatism of the Manchus, their unwillingness to recognize the changes going on in the world around them, and their pride which would not admit that any foreign nation could be the equal of China. All this would have been quite suitable for the Emperors of the Han, the T'ang or the Sung—even the Ming, when China was in advance of most of the world and far ahead of all her near neighbours. But in the nineteenth century change was coming from all sides; China was no longer the Central Empire surrounded with barbarians or peoples who had imitated her own civilization. The conquest of Siberia by the Russians, and the conquest of the Tartars by the Manchus at the same period, brought China and Russia close together until they had a common frontier, and a very long one.

The Manchus never seemed to have realized what this would mean for the future, just as they never understood the power of the seafaring

nations from western Europe. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries those nations still used sailing ships, at least until after 1850. But the Chinese Navy was still composed of ancient junks, far inferior in gun-power and sailing ability to the frigates and men o' war of the Western nations. The Chinese under the Manchus made no attempt to modernize this navy and keep command of the sea along their coast. When they woke up to this mistake, it was too late. One reason for this was the distrust which the Manchu Court in Peking felt for the southern Chinese, from whom the best sailors came, for it was the south which had fought the Manchus to the last, conspired against them when conquered, and was always ready to rebel.

In the Ming and Manchu periods Chinese literature made a new advance, in the development of the novel. The first long full-scale novels were written in the beginning of the Ming dynasty, and others followed throughout both dynasties down to modern times. The most famous of the early ones, called the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, deals with the period after the fall of the Han dynasty. It roughly follows the real history of the time, but is full of exciting and romantic adventures which are not real history. The heroes are the founder (and his followers) of the western kingdom of Shu Han, which the author regards as the true successor to the fallen Han; the villains are the leaders of the other kingdoms. This book is a

great favourite in China; many plays have been written around stories taken from it, and the chief characters are known to everyone.

In later times the novelists turned from historical romances to stories about the life of ordinary people, sometimes rich and powerful official families, sometimes ordinary citizens. These novels give a very full picture of life in Ming and early Manchu times. The intrigues of the officials at Court, the amusements of the great families, making poetry competitions and other games, the adventures of travellers on the road, still absolutely true to life a few years ago, the difficulties of love affairs in a society where men and women could not freely meet; all the complications of the large family system, with scores of relatives living together, their jealousies and quarrels, are brought out with great skill and humour. Partly because the novelists were so frank about the faults of their society, the government did not like the novels; many of them were banned, but it does not seem to have made much difference; everyone read them, and they still do.

In some of these novels a spirit of rebellion, or what might almost be called "liberty and democracy", appears, perhaps revealing the revolutionary feeling which was gradually growing among the people. One famous novel called *The Fringes of the Marsh* relates the adventures of a band of robbers, all of whom have become outlaws to escape the cruelty or injustice of

officials. They always win their many battles and skirmishes with the cowardly government troops, help the poor and rob the grasping rich officials. If any good official appears, before long he is certain to be wrongly blamed or accused by his wicked colleagues and forced to fly to the bandits. One of the heroes of these tales had got very drunk and fallen down on the public road. A bullying official came along and struck him to make him get up; the drunken man answers him, "The road on which I am lying is the Emperor's road; the wine which made me drunk was bought with my own money—so what has it got to do with you?" That was a spirit very rarely shown in imperial China.

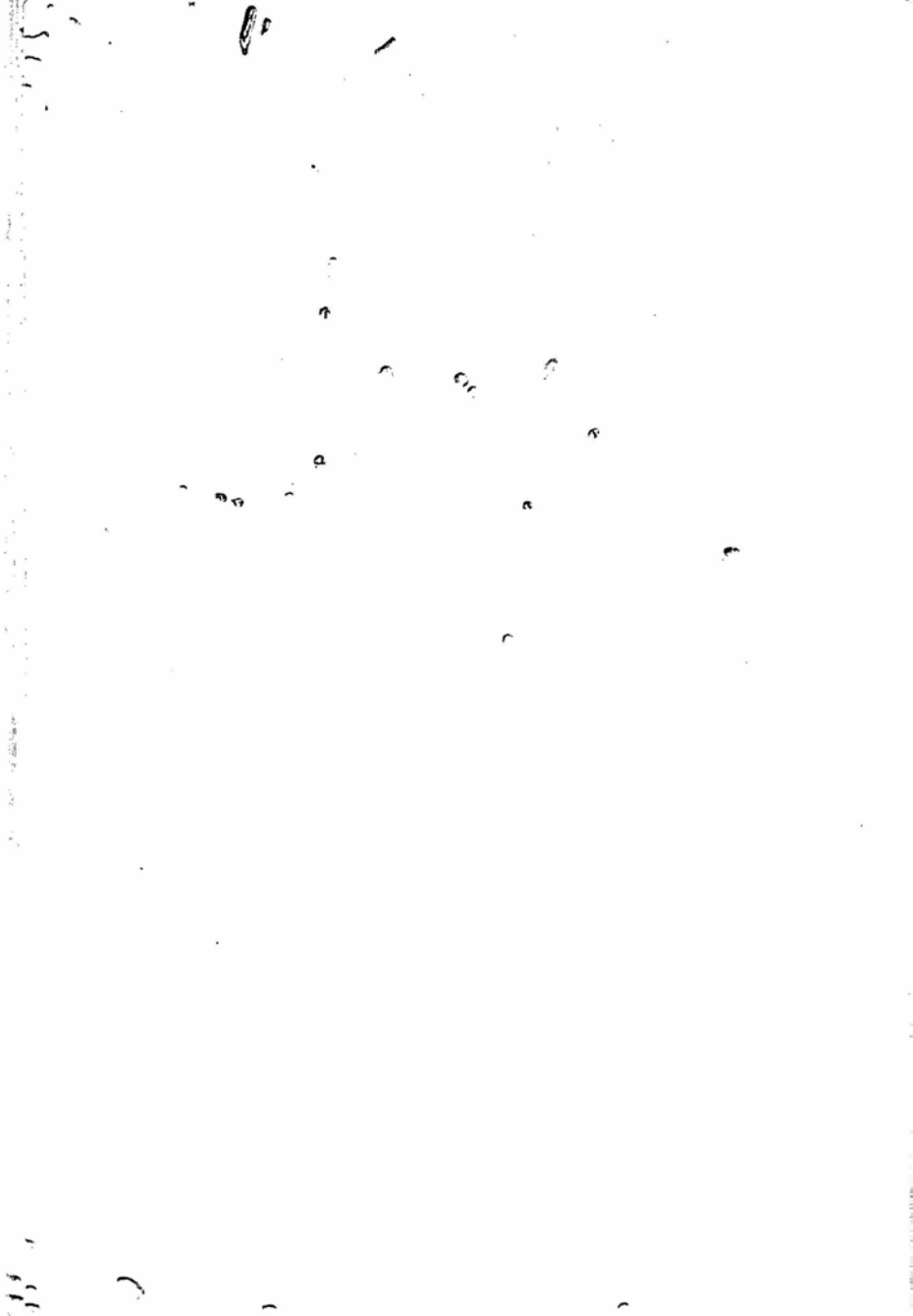
Imperial China lasted into our own times; the Manchu dynasty did not abdicate the throne until 1912, and there are many older Chinese still living who served at the Court in the first years of this century. At that Court, up until 1911, life was lived as if time had stood still and the modern world did not exist. The ancient ceremonies, the gorgeous robes, the stiff etiquette, the splendid buildings, quite without any modern comfort, the hordes of servants in fantastic uniforms, the guards in armour with swords and spears; princes and princesses carried in palanquins, because they were too great to walk a few steps, all went on as it had a thousand, even two thousand years before. But beyond the high red walls of the palace China had changed for ever.

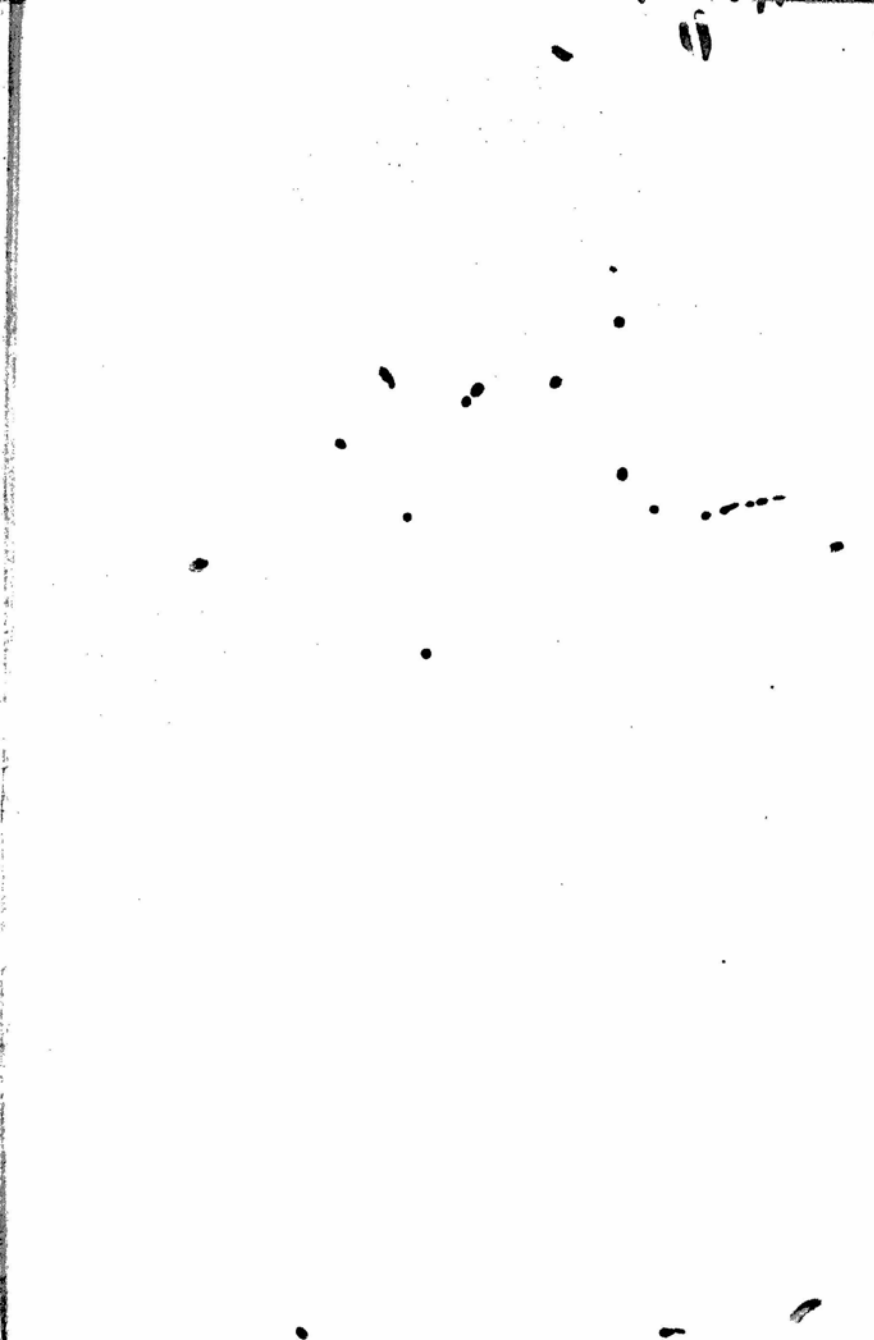
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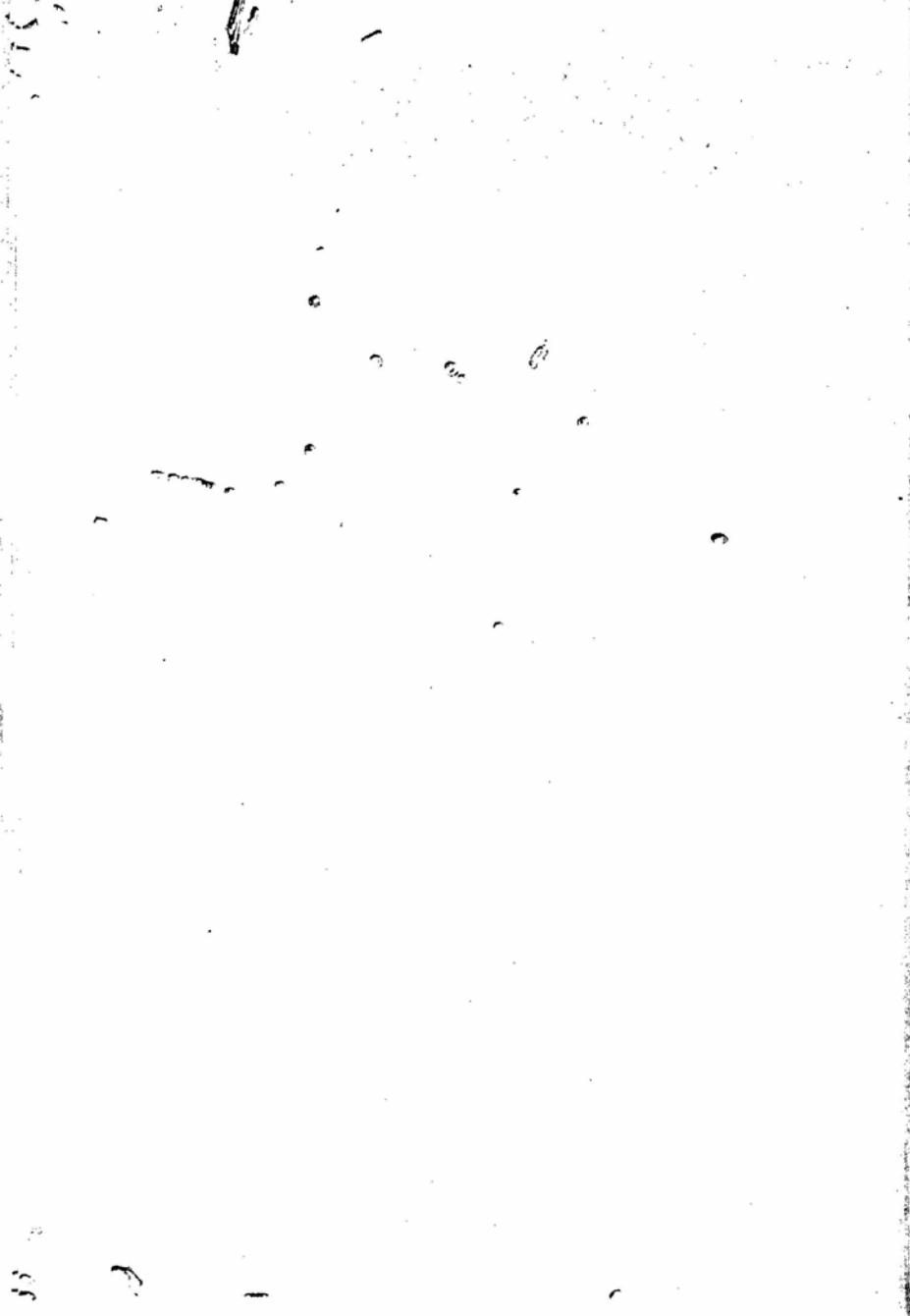
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